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The Black Caucus:

A Theatrical Exploration of the Black Experience in a Predominantly White Institution

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Departmental Honors Thesis

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Department of Performing Arts Theatre Division

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The Black Caucus:

A Theatrical Exploration of the Black Experience in a Predominantly White Institution

Why I Decided to Create a Thesis Performance

The foundation of my thesis was laid in May of 2022 when I had the privilege of taking part in a transformative journey to Kenya through the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga's Honors College. During this remarkable experience, we immersed ourselves in the lives of the Kenyan people in Nairobi and the Maasai Mara, looking to unravel the interplay between innovation, empathy, and culture. As an African American, I experienced a profound sense of belonging in a majority Black environment for the first time in my life, which left an indelible impression on me, offering a sense of relief and connection. Those three weeks in Kenya remain among the most cherished memories of my life.

However, during the third week, a life-changing event occurred as I contracted Covid and found myself confined to an isolated tent. In the solitude of that moment, I contemplated how this experience could serve as the foundation for a compelling script, but more importantly, a poignant thesis. It struck me that the contrast between my experiences as a Black individual in a predominantly Black space versus my experiences as a minority in predominantly white settings was a vital aspect worth exploring. This contemplation gave birth to the concept of a thesis: *The Black Caucus*, which revolves around the central question of how Black individuals find and shape their identities in predominantly white spaces.

Upon my return to the United States, I engaged in discussions with my thesis instructor, solidifying the idea of a performance as the focal point of my thesis. Given my initial interest in playwriting, I saw this as a remarkable opportunity to put my writing skills to the test. I resolved to conduct interviews with Black students, faculty, and alumni of my institution, which happens

to be predominantly white, to glean insights into their experiences. By skillfully transcribing their words into a script, I sought to craft a powerful production set to debut during the spring semester of my thesis year. Through this project, I aspired to shed light on the nuanced and complex realities faced by Black individuals in predominantly white educational spaces, fostering empathy, understanding, and meaningful dialogue on this crucial subject matter.

The Meaning behind *The Black Caucus*

Upon realizing the profound significance this piece would hold as the culmination of my ideals, I looked to craft a phrase that encapsulated its essence. I envisioned a term that would symbolize unity, representation, and empowerment. Inspired by my experiences in Kenya, a nation with a Black majority, I wanted to pay homage to the collective of Black individuals whose voices I sought to amplify through this work. Thus, the phrase "A Black Collective" appeared as the focal point of my creation, emphasizing the unity and shared experiences of the people involved.

In delving into the complexities of being Black in America's history, I acknowledged that our very existence is inherently political, despite any claims to the contrary. This sentiment is echoed in some of the monologues presented, exploring how our experiences are shaped by the color of our skin. Marcus's perspective on Affirmative Action, for instance, underscores this reality (see [Appendix C](#)). Considering the overarching theme of our collective narratives being inherently political, it seemed fitting to culminate the phrase with a political term that would reinforce this message. "Caucus" was an instant revelation – signifying "a closed meeting of a group of persons belonging to the same political party or faction usually to select candidates or to decide on policy," ("Caucus," *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). Thus, the powerful moniker *The*

Black Caucus came into being, standing for a united faction of Black voices here at UTC, where our stories and identities converge to create a compelling script that shines a light on our shared experiences.

The Influence of Anna Deavere Smith, August Wilson, and Eve Ensler

The formatting and production of this project were greatly influenced when my thesis advisor, Anne Swedberg, reintroduced me to the remarkable Anna Deavere Smith, a distinguished playwright renowned for her unique approach to crafting monologues. Smith's renowned work, *Notes from the Field*, delves into civil injustice and the lived experiences of affected individuals, bravely addressing issues of race and gender in their truest forms. Inspired by Smith's technique, which involves interviewing a select group and transcribing their words into powerful monologues, I aspired to unearth the core truths of Black identity. Following Smith's interviewing format, I successfully crafted the compelling monologues of Anonymous, Shonda, Sean, Tabitha, Ezekiel, and Jazmine (see Appendix B).

Another profound influence on my creative journey was the incomparable August Wilson, my all-time favorite playwright. Wilson's masterful works such as *The Piano Lesson* have left an indelible impact on my artistic aspirations. Although I am presently too young to act in his plays, his artistic spirit is a benchmark for me in my career. Emulating Wilson's immersive approach, I endeavored to steep myself in the environment around me, exercising creativity and innovation in my writing. By attentively listening to the stories of black individuals on campus and in the city, I transformed their narratives into powerful pieces of writing, giving birth to Nanissa, Tony, Maya, and Marcus's stories (see Appendix C).

For my final source of inspiration, I turn to playwright and actress Eve Ensler, whose work in *What I Want My Words to Do to You* had a profound impact on my vision for this

project. The documentary-style film captures Ensler's interviews and workshops with incarcerated women, whose stories are transformed into poignant letters read aloud by renowned actors. Drawing inspiration from Ensler's approach, I adapted my project when faced with challenges during the spring semester of my thesis. Instead of a physical production, I chose to transform the piece into a compelling radio/audio production that can be found on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/zY3aMRLJ-bs> . In lieu of actors, I invited my fellow Black peers, instructors, professors, faculty, and alumni to lend their voices to the monologues presented in the piece.

Together, these three influential figures, Anna Deavere Smith, August Wilson, and Eve Ensler, have shaped and enriched my creative process, empowering me to explore and amplify the voices and experiences of *The Black Caucus* with utmost authenticity and passion.

My Image for *The Black Caucus*



I performed in Eugene O'Neill's play *The Hairy Ape* in the summer of 2021 with the experimental theater group Obvious Dad at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga's Jim

Lewis Studio Theatre. This was yet another life-changing event for me, seeing as it was my very first acting job outside the university. Using Photoshop, my own artistic eye, and a production photo of myself from *The Hairy Ape*, I created the art piece above. It's of a Black man who is controlled by a glow in a pitch-black environment. As a Black man, I discovered myself rediscovering my inner radiance during this process.

I was at an all-time high with who I am and was comfortable as a storyteller onstage at the time of *The Hairy Ape*. I correlated my “Black boy joy,” a popular phrase amongst the Black community, with the joy of other Black individuals. That’s why I used my production photo for inspiration. I also wanted to show the glow I saw on the faces of the people I interviewed as they told their stories for *The Black Caucus*. If one of the interviewees got emotional, they shed tears of joy as they relished their blackness. Also, since *The Black Caucus* is a collective, that joy can be shown through the glow in the image as well. The Black man in the art piece is holding the straps of his overalls. This is a symbol of him holding on to who he is and is a trait constantly expressed in the stories of *The Black Caucus*.

How I Created the Script for *The Black Caucus*

To learn more about their experiences as minorities on campus at our PWI (predominantly white institution), I chose to interview several Black students and staff members. When I was finished, I shaped the interviews into monologues, which I then incorporated into a script and performed as an audio play with a cast of actors at the UTC library's recording studio. I served as the audio engineer for the production. Having an all-Black ensemble during the recording process, in my opinion, enhanced my thesis' central idea that "universal experience

equals identity." The connections that my readers formed with the content provided genuine reflections on their own experiences rather than superficial ones.

For the writing, I extended my original avenue of turning interviews into monologues and adopted August Wilson's method of writing. This allowed me to incorporate other angles of the Black identity. I went as far as sitting inside a McDonald's for lunch to write, which culminated in the sibling writing of Maya and Tony (See Appendix C). I also used my own creativity to adapt a poem from a personal experience, giving rise to Demarco's monologue (See Appendix D). For the finale of the audio performance, I adapted essences from the monologues that came before it. This creates an overlay or choir to cap off a collective of thought and identity.

When I pivoted to create an audio performance rather than a stage play, I used the studio software in the UTC library to help put it all together with the recorded voices of those the performers as well as other engineering techniques I add to enhance the production. Every overlay, mixing, and revamping is of my own very junior production caliber and skill. That made the production flawless in the ways it was meant to be. A production of mess ups, performer stumbles and moments of reflection which curated a vulnerable flaw. Then I placed the audio into a video format now listed on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/zY3aMRLJ-bs>.

How I Created the Audio Production of *The Black Caucus*

I chose random students and professors and alumni to read and not act. As an actor, I notice and realize that when in the acting mindset, I tend to bring my own identity onto the already written material. With the words being so real, and with the occasional error, the performance had a chance to be overly clean and too manufactured. So, to create a role in a

vulnerable environment full of mistakes, pauses and background noises, I invoked the help of performers with little to no prior acting experience.

The intro and outro of the audio production is of a Kenyan band. In Kenya it is a societal rule across the board never to interrupt a musician or band during the playing of their music. That is why I played an entire selection of music from beginning to end during *The Black Caucus's* intro and ending segments. The lack of interruption allows listeners to settle into the diaspora of identities going to be read off in the audio production. While working with these traditions, I decided to add the sound effect of African wood shakers. These shakers symbolize shaking off the material of the previous monologue and dancing towards the new monologue to be read.

One of the musical pieces that needs a wider emphasis is the usage of British Royal music, which I added towards the end of Reed's monologue. The British Royal music is an orchestrated musical piece that is stereotypically played upon the arrival of a British monarch. Due to the African slave trade, countless Africans were forced to become Black Americans, losing the grounds and foundations from which they came. Many Black Americans today are unaware of the circumstances their ancestors faced. That part of history is lost in unreachable bounds with no records. So, there is a saying that's radiant in the black community: "We come from Kings and Queens." It is a notion and a dream, that our background is gold and the hardship we have experienced will transform and push us back into a royal mindset. This royal mindset asks Black Americans not to look down on people but to relish pure joy without fear of societal backlash. It says, "We take pride in who we are." So, when the actors repeatedly say, "We are the Black Caucus" towards the end of the audio performance, listeners hear the pride and confidence of the identities being presented before them. The added British royal music can also be described as a "snide" throw towards those who took us up in the first place.

Finally, I added some vocal overlays to the audio performance that created a cinematic feel to the performance. For example, as Tabitha reads back her letter from her deceased father, his words come over hers creating a parallel juxtaposition of their voices. Her reading comes off as a daughter who is missing her father and his reading is that of someone who will always be with her, long after his death.

The Script

THE BLACK CAUCUS

by Isaiah Mark Owens

ISIAIAH MARK OWENS

Good day folks. I am Isaiah Mark Owens, the writer and creator of the Black Caucus. A series of interviews as well as real life interpretive writings that have been collected over the course of 8 months. The interviews and information gathered are all from students of African American and African descent. Presented before you is the radio version adaptation of the Black Caucus as staged reading. The readings have all been approved by the respective parties interviewed and the readers are everyday Black students on campus. The way this is going to happen is simple. Whenever a monologue stops, a new one begins. We have Rodney, say hello Rodney.

RODNEY

Hi ya!

ISIAIAH MARK OWENS

Hello Rodney. Now he has-

RODNEY

(Interruptingly)

How yall doin'.

ISIAIAH MARK OWENS

They are doing fine now. Thank you Rodney. To signal this transition between monologues, Rodney is going to shake a wood shaker from Africa. Rodney, can you demonstrate for us please.

Rodney shakes the wood shaker.

ISAIAH MARK OWENS

Thank you. Now I hope you enjoy this piece of medium as I, myself, have and I can't wait to hear what you get out of it. Welcome to the Black Caucus. Cue the Intro Rodney! It's that button. No right there. Its glowing red. Yup, that's the one.

ANONYMOUS

I'd rather stay anonymous for my interview. I'm not ashamed of what I might say but I don't want people to judge me. Well, I don't want my friends to judge me. To be honest, I've grown not to really care what other people think but deep inside I still think of what other black people might think of me. At least, growing up was a major issue. Before coming here, I grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood. My parents adopted me when I was two and ever since then, I was surrounded by white people. It wasn't as bad as what Colin Kaepernick went through because my parents aren't racist. They were IGNORANT sometimes, but they never tried to equate their experience to mine. They at least had my Uncle Rodney come over a lot to help me out. He's not my real uncle but growing up he felt like one. He went to Vanderbilt with my dad and since then they have been best friends. He trusted him so over time, I did too. Uncle Rodney took me to the recreational center almost every Saturday. There I saw the kids play basketball and even hung out with a few sometimes. I also noticed the hairstyles of the other kids. It took a lot of begging my mom but overtime she let him take me to his barbershop. It was different but cool listening and talking with the old heads. They taught me a lot about my history and where I came from. Something I grew to appreciate a lot more now that I am older.

When the time came for me to choose the universities I was interested in, I initially wanted to go to a HBCU but due to cost I settled for this university. In high school, my friends were all white. The friends I made at the recreational center all had either moved or I just didn't see them. I was scared I would be seen as a coon or something if I came here and just hung out with white people again, so I tried to go to all the black organized events the very first week I started. I talked to all the students from the organizations that hosted these events and became friends with a good portion of them too. To this day I keep in contact with most of them.

All this to say, before I became who I am today, I was a scared black boy afraid of being black. That's just real for me to say but it's the truth. I thought I wasn't good enough to resemble this community because I didn't grow up eating dressing or listening to real gospel music on Saturday mornings. I didn't have the universal shared experiences of growing up black, so I became lost in the shadow of that. However, through my eagerness to be accepted I realized I already was. My skin doesn't define me, but I feel it does allow me to close my eyes and reflect more than when I did. Also, I would like to say I love white people as I love all people. I just needed to understand my own first and I think I did that. My way. I hope this inspires others to not be afraid of your own blackness and take charge of it.

I am also proud to say I started to find my mother. Not my adoptive mother but the one who carried me for 9 months. We talked a bit, and she invited me out to her home this summer. To be honest that scared little black boy has been creeping up, but my girlfriend and best friend are coming with me, so I have great foundational support when I talk to her face to face. I have 3 younger siblings I am also meant to meet so that is exciting too. My parents totally support it and now I am going to have two families. Something many people will never get to experience. I am unapologetically black, unapologetically scared, unapologetically hopeful, and unapologetically me. Thank You.

EZEKIAL

Hello! I am Ezekiel. I am here to tell you what all students who are religious go through. Most notably as a Christian. Growing up in church, especially as a pastor's kid, came with its ups and downs, but ultimately, I am grateful for the way I was brought up. Being a Christian is already a challenging walk in this world but being a pastor's kid who has always been involved in church made that walk a little more challenging. I didn't do a lot of the things that typical middle and high schoolers do such as go on trips throughout the weekend, party, or go to many events outside of the school environment. But I still enjoyed my grade school years playing sports, being involved in many orgs, and even DJing games.

Through church, I learned how to be a servant, how to work hard, how to be loyal, and how to stay true to myself. The characteristics that I learned growing up in church allowed me to enjoy school and life in my own way and presented me with opportunities that have placed me in the position I am in now in life. I have too many memories to count from summer camps, conventions, community service, and many more. One memory that I recall was back in 2018 when I was privileged to play for my denomination's national women's conference as the music director. The convention took place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where I was able to play on a national stage. Through this opportunity, I met other great musicians and even had the opportunity to help out with the youth by being a chaperone on the field trips and leading certain activities. This is one of my favorite memories of being in church because even though I was there for church, I was able to branch out and serve my community while doing what I love as a musician.

Being black and Christian to me always will go hand in hand because God for me is a source of peace, hope, strength, and confidence. It's not a secret that this world is cruel and being black doesn't make it easier, but because I know I have God on my side, I have no reason to fear or fret. I know it is a very common scripture, but it is true, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. I respect and love everyone under the sun and will continue to play my god given talent wherever God needs me to be. I am faith driven, friendly, compassionate, as well as a hard worker. Thank you.

SHONDA

To quote the Grammy and BET Award winning singer, Solange, “Don’t touch my hair, Don’t Touch my Hair.” Hello, I am Shonda. Growing up I always knew my life was for the Big Screen and Theatre. My life revolved around studying black actresses like Angela Bassett, Lynn Whitfield, and even Monique. Later, I’m now looking at Zendaya, Keke Palmer, and even Gabrielle Union who I feel is severely underrated. Sometimes I’d even study black actors like Denzel Washington. He was so fine in Malcolm X. Growing up I really thought he was Malcolm X until my mother told me he wasn’t. Crazy, Anyways, I felt the best way to pursue my dreams was to go to college. I don’t regret it but looking back there are quite a few moments I wish motivated me to go elsewhere.

There were often times where I felt feelings of isolation. In the duration of my entire college theater career, I was one of the few black individuals in the department. I won’t reveal the number of black students but let’s just say sometimes we either were going to middle school or fell short just of pre-k. We never felt uncomfortable per day because unfortunately we were used to being one out of a few in a white space. Most notably, one of the main things that always made us feel different is when it came to our hair and makeup for a show. Most of the time people just didn’t even bother with coming up with ideas to style our hair or even the idea of a wig never came into play. I’d watch interviews of these beautiful black women who talked about this well into their careers. They spoke about how there never a black stylist on set or designer was so either they did it themselves or didn’t bother to fight against the mold. It didn’t really give me hope that could change here.

I will say that near the end of my time here, I did feel more seen with our costume designer. Me and him would have extensive conversations about this situation and what it meant for me as a black woman and him in a position to change the climate of inclusivity in the department. We had gotten the opportunity to film a televised theatrical piece where I was able to have my natural hair out and wear golden makeup that I felt complimented and supported my black features and personified how myself and ourselves look within the culture. Me and another black actor cried in our own rehearsal, but it wasn’t tears of sadness. It was a joy. Me and him got to be our unapologetic selves in a space we finally could be comfortable in. The televised piece in question was very questionable with other themes and what the name itself brought; but now, it felt like a mini victory for me and the others.

Ever since then I have been making sure to audition for roles that celebrate my blackness and my identity without compromise. I know this industry likes us when we are down, but my goal is to portray us in the best shades of excellence possible. I am Angela Bassett, Lynn Whitfield, Viola Davis, Halle Berry while also being me for the future. An aspiration personified. I believe that is my ultimate goal in terms of who I want to be and who I am now. We are going to hustle until the wheels fall off and that is that. I am talented, gorgeous, a hustler, and an innovator. “Don’t Touch My Hair, Don’t Touch My Hair.” Thank you.

DEMARCO

I can still hear the roars and screams of the white people sometimes when I sleep or daydream in class. Or at least that's what I heard in my mind when it happened. A reality that could have developed into another reality that was real. However, this thought, and this incident truly wasn't real. It was a spectacle. My name is Demarco. This incident that changed my perspective and view on life happened over the summer. It was hot out and we were sweating the moment we stepped outside. We, as in me and my colleagues at the time. My friends. It was so hot out I think even the a/c units were out for a couple of hours. There was this bright and great idea to just embrace the heat and go out and have some fun. So, we did what any other college aged person would do. We had a water gun fight. In our group chat we invited the entire crew to come out and just be kids again but only we, the black people, had shown up. Well one of our white friends did show up but she always does nothing new there.

We really were just having such a great day. That feeling of childhood innocence we always heard about in school just propelled us further and further to have fun. I am a very imaginative person, so my own imagination just exponentially grew tenfold. One minute we were on the beaches of Costa Rica and next we are under the waters of Atlantis.

Another minute goes by, and I am a stormtrooper from Star Wars. God, it had been so long since I have played tagged. We were having so much fun that even a photographer nearby saw us and took photo after photo. The smiles on our faces never actually left our faces. The water chases, the music, the vibes. It honestly felt like a scene out of a 90s film. Well, that 90s film vibe swiftly turned into a four-hundred-year-old reality. A white woman who looked to be in her early thirties but had the voice of a veteran not much older than fifty marched towards us and started to berate us. Our smiles formed into confused looks and expressions. Our eyes never leave the hateful gaze of her but meeting each other's at the very same time. Lie after lying spewed from her heart and mouth.

"You have been told to stop. So, this is your final warning."/

When? We talked with the management, and they said it was alright. /

"You have disturbed the peace. This is your final warning."/

What? They said it was fine. What's wrong, why can we-/

"Stop being a Nigga and bow down to me."

That last part she didn't say but it was what we felt. Being black, respecting boundaries, having fun, being ourselves, resulted in an envious hatred of lies we ourselves can never accumulate. That furious fire behind her eyes resulted in the empty abyss of our own. We were stuck for weeks in a mind game of your fault, our fault, who's fault. I even, for the first time, discussed my thoughts with a therapist. I never was taught how to properly display my thoughts and emotions, but this intruder took that from me. On the one hand it opened the door for me to find trust in someone. I had never spoken to a therapist, barely even a counselor, and now I speak with them every so often. Everyone, especially the

black community, needs to look more in therapy. It can be seen as less than taboo, but it truly helps. On the other hand, though, I was forced to confront myself in a situation I was already confronted in.

Now the matter was squared away with a thousand apologies. I'm Sorry/ it was my fault/ you got it all wrong/ I'm sorry/ it was so hard growing up/ excuse/excuse/ excuse/ excuse/ excuse. To be frank and honest, we are tired as hell of excuses. The worst part was that it had to have happened here. It happened in our safe space. The place where we learn to grow and fail to hide. How can rhetoric of that extreme nature breach the walls that are within these sacred grounds? Was it already here that it personified itself to be what it is? A failure of the systems put in place or is it the equivalence that history is always so desperate to relieve. How am I to react to such a cynical position than to accept those apologies and move on. Are we truly at a point in time to move those boundaries and those in positions of power or are we to settle? I'm getting mixed signals but never mixed accords. The diagnosis of that day was a little black boy bruised on the playground. The bruise being the symptoms of and supreme questioning. I am hurt, alarmed, triggered, genuine, surpassingly calm, well mannered, nice to a fault, and sick and tired of being sick and tired. Thank you.

JAZMINE JACKSON

Hello. I am Jazmine Jackson. I am a part of all of this, but I am also special and unique in my own way. I am black and I am also Muslim. A blessing unique to my personnel that I do not take likely. I am in the best experience of both worlds unique to me and my juncture. I am a first-generation college student from Nashville, Tennessee. I come from a diverse background as my parents were Muslim immigrants from Ethiopia. I was born as they were getting acclimated to the country, so it provided me with a unique experience. Although we were fortunate enough to have everything we needed, I didn't come from a financially wealthy family so money and finances impacted much of my childhood and my college experience.

Being Muslim immigrants in a post 9/11 country was a unique shared experience that all Muslims in America faced, especially to women who were openly Muslim which my mother and many of the women in my family were. These factors were just a few of the biggest influences on my life. My faith correlates to my identity as it has influenced almost every part of my life. Growing up, the Islamic faith wasn't taught to me as just a faith but rather a way of life. By the age of three I knew my Arabic alphabet and was able to recite some portions of our holy text while also understanding basic Islamic concepts like eating strictly with my right hand and the importance of the hijab. This was the norm in Muslim households that had strong Muslim parents as they wanted to teach the faith to their children. After moving from the Midwest to the South, my mother recognized the importance of an Islamic education so by the time I was in 1st grade I was enrolled in an Islamic private school for elementary school. Beyond that, I was placed in weekend

Quran classes for memorization. These things facilitated my actual learning of faith, which inherently impacted the way of life my mother and I lived. Dietary restrictions limited the foods we ate, rules impacted my association with the opposite gender, and even what I was able to watch on TV.

An important factor that is especially important to understanding why my faith impacted me the way it did was also the cultural impact of being from an immigrant family that consisted of just me and my mother. Cultural differences between Americans and foreigners naturally creates a barrier in lifestyles that can only be broken down through the lived experience. BEING on campus and being a part of the various organizations that correlated with my identity made my experience so very memorable. The intersectionality of my identity allowed me to be a proud member of the Black Student Alliance, The African Student Association, The Muslim Student Association, and The Sister Circle. Each organization provided me with a unique community that allowed my identity to flourish. It also allowed me to bring my experiences that correlated with one identity to all the various groups as my lived experience was unique. I am unique and I love everything that comes with who I am. There is a quote from a woman who just gets it I think will be beneficial for the world's understanding. The first female Muslim American athlete to ever win an Olympic medal and a woman who wore her hijab while proudly doing it, is Ibtihaj Muhammad. She once said, "I've had to fight for every win, every place at the table, every ounce of respect on my path to becoming a world-class athlete. And I will continue to fight because the prize this time – an America that truly respects all of its citizens – is worth more than any medal." I work in a state office building and words like that help motivate me to work hard for change every day. My passion is sacred to me as well as who I am and what I represent. It is gentle, kind, caring, explosive, real and honest. Thank you.

SEAN

Hey, how are you all doing? I'm Sean and I am a current student that goes here. I started during Covid year and now I'm in my Junior year. So crazy to think about. Life then was so weird, and everyone was going through something. I even was going through something I didn't realize at the time was a part of who I am. I had four roommates in my freshman year. One of whom I got close to fast. His name was Caesar. He was Hispanic and the other two guys were white so me and him naturally hit it off because we just shared more experiences. I still talk to those guys though sometimes to check in. Me and Caesar hung out a lot and it got to the point we made a larger friend group based off our friendship. The school had so many restrictions at the time, so we all had to find ways to hang out together. All of us loved the outdoors and were athletes so every weekend we would go hiking up some wilderness trail.

One weekend in particular the other people in the group couldn't join us so me and Caesar went alone. For some reason he seemed nervous. I don't know why because this was a trail we had done before but I passed it off and we moved forward. We went to a little watering hole for a break, and we made some small talk. Out of nowhere he turned

around and kissed me. Before this I never felt attracted to guys before. I mean I noticed if someone was attractive, but I just thought that was an unspoken thing. I never had dated a girl, but my parents always assured me I'm just really into my studies and that I'll get with a girl when I become more open to it. When he kissed me, I jumped back and stared off into space. He had to have felt my awkwardness and suggested we start hiking back. We hiked back to his car and rode back home silently. We got back to the parking lot and before he got out of the car, I pulled him in and kissed him back. After that, we talked for hours. He talked about how he had always wanted to be out, but his family was very conservative, so he wanted to wait until college. I didn't really think about that. What my parents would think now. I should have but I was so enraptured with what was going on in that moment I couldn't make myself think of anyone else. Me and Caesar started secretly dating after that and life was so high for me. I didn't really care what others on campus thought. I was embracing a new side of myself that I never knew existed.

Well, up until that point I still never told my family. They always gave me mixed signals on their opinions of gay people so I didn't know what would happen. Well, I didn't really have a choice because I was outed accidentally by a social media post. There is an event called Coming Out Cookout hosted by SPECTRUM that me and Caesar went to. I was there merely for the food, but it felt kind of nice being around the community for the first time. Me and Caesar were still very much a secret, but I guess he didn't care like I didn't because it was so new and exciting. A photographer took a photo of us. We were laughing because we put cake on each other's noses. Now my mother follows every account from the school, and I guess one of the accounts posted it because she called me as soon as she saw it. I will never forget it. I answered the phone, and it went like.

Hello? /

“Sean. Are you gay?”/

What are you talking about? /

“There is a photo of you and this Mexican boy laughing and y'all look way too closely. The rainbow symbols are behind y'all. Is your gay son? ”/

At that moment I could have done several things. Tell her the truth or lie. But I was scared. I feared telling the truth because what if she didn't love me anymore. What if I was an outcast in a family where everyone depended on me to make it in life? Who was I? So, I lied.

No mother I am not. We just went to the cookout for free food. /

“Good. You know we didn't raise you like that. Be careful around these people. Good night. Love you. ”/

Yeah goodnight. /

I didn't even say I love you back because I'm not sure I would've meant it. That night I didn't even talk to Caesar. I was alone in my room ready to end it all. I found myself in my closet physically speaking and I was in such a dark space. I felt like I took up a space God intended for someone else. I questioned everything I learned and even who I was. It was so bad I stole some pills from Caesar, and I had planned to take my own life. Luckily, he got to me in time, and I was hospitalized. It hurts me till this day he was the one to have found me but I'm also relieved. My parents and siblings came to town and on that hospital bed I came out to them. My siblings comforted me right away, but my parents were silent. My mother even left the room.

Nowadays me and my dad are good. He still is awkward, but he makes the effort. My mother doesn't though. She didn't outright disown me, but she might as hell have. I'm numb to that pain. Me and Caesar no longer are officially together but we are bound as friends for life so that can be visited one day. It's just best we find who we are separately. We live off campus with another friend so it isn't as separate as it could be, but we moved. I go to a suicide survivor meeting every week to discuss my feelings so I'm also doing good in life. I am now out and am courageous in every sense of the word. I am courageous, brave, and ready to take on the world. Thank you.

TONY

Yo. I'm Tony. Maya's big brother. I'm a Junior and she is now a sophomore... I think. Yeah, she's gonna be a sophomore. I got an athletics scholarship for Tennis, and she seemed to like the school, so she followed me here. Growing up, me and her were like fire and ice. I was an introvert, and she was an extrovert. Everyone adored her, as they should. I mean, she's great. She got straight As, did a lot of clubs and seemed to be a magnet wherever she went. Our parents adored her, and she was my dad's favorite. I was close to it mom but me and my dad didn't get along often. He would try and compare me to her on a daily basis and felt my work, which was similar to hers, was lacking. He made me practice for hours on end and truthfully left me resenting him more days than others.

I never realized my skin color until there was an incident at school. A bunch of boys, white, black, mexican, you name it. They walked past me and started calling me a bunch of names. I didn't know why they targeted me specifically until they called me a tar baby. Then I realized it was because I was darker than everyone else who was around. I was upset, no I was angry at the fact I can be singled out like that. And by other black boys? I was in desperate need of a wakeup call, and it seems that was it.

Now my sister may tell it differently, but I didn't go home and cry. My mom just knew something was wrong with me. It got to the point where she yelled at me to tell her, and I did. I kid you not, the next day she drove me and my sister to school and got out with a bat. She pulled me by the arm and told me to point at the boys who did it. I did and she

sent me off to class. I don't know what she did, but I know they didn't mess with me after that.

I didn't learn to love being black until college. My skin tone makes me a sort of anomaly that only a few others in the world can relate to. Here, a lot of my peers don't see how dark I am. They see me as a black man trying to make it in the world as they are. I walk through campus full of strides and I strive to be the GOAT. The "Greatest of all Time." I am a part of many different multicultural groups on campus so other students who come here can love how to love their blackness. I'm not ashamed to say my skin is beautiful and can earn its own degree. I am in a league of my own. I am the G.O.A.T, loved, and accepting.

MAYA

I'm Tony's sister, Maya. We're only a year apart. He's a Junior this year while I'm a sophomore. Growing up, I loved my older brother. He was my direct influence, and I learned a lot from him. Sometimes me and him would bike down to a nearby store and buy two sodas and orange slices: the candy. He would drink purple soda and I would down some orange fanta soda. He and my mother both were the only dark-skins of the family, but I never really paid much attention to it. Me and my father were light skinned along with most of our extended family.

When we were younger, in school there was an incident where he was picked on one day for being dark-skinned. He was walking down the hall and a group of students with all different ethnicities called him a TarBaby. He came home crying and the next day my mother came to school with a bat and scared the boys to death. That night she pulled me aside and made me promise I'd never treat him any different. Of course, I would not. He was my brother, and we bled the same. At the time I thought to myself, "they would've called me the same thing. I mean we are both black. They just saw him first." But I agreed and kept pushing.

Now, I realize that kind of thinking wasn't right. Not that I was completely wrong in thinking I could have also been discriminated against, but I did the very thing she asked me not to and alienated his experience. What he went through was terrible. So terrible that he cried himself to sleep that night and I just remember the screaming that gave me pain. Ever since then I have worked on myself through my courses, I'm an Africana Studies major, to wishes undo any promotions I have about colorism in my community. I am light skin, and I am proud of my blackness. Me being light doesn't negate my blackness whatsoever and I do wish people get that. However, I also feel we should discuss the fact that in society we could be seen as the safe choices in life. We are light enough to accommodate societal terms and sometimes my brothers and sisters who are of a different, darker shades are left out. No matter how hard the conversation may get or be critical, it's time to unravel and work towards a united front. I love you, Tony.

Forever and always, your little sis, Maya.

TABITHA FREEMAN

Hello and good afternoon. I am Mrs. Tabitha Freeman and I'm so sorry if my voice is a bit high-pitched today. I am just so excited because it is my daughter's 6th birthday! This morning she woke me up by jumping up and down my bed. Growing up we weren't allowed to do that, and she isn't usually either but today I let her have a freebie. So yeah, after this, I am going to go pick her up from school, take her for ice cream, and then I'm driving her and her friends to the skating rink. A full afternoon day's plan but I am honored to be speaking with you today before that venture. When I had Anastasia, it was the best day of my life. Well before I got to that part, yes, I did get pregnant in college. It's there that it happened and so I was a pregnant mother by age 19. However, when I found out, I ran around to all my friends yelling, "We are having a baby! It's going to be a little girl. I can just feel it!" And I was right. We did have a little baby girl no heavier than seven pounds. She has my eyes. Such pretty eyes and she still does. She does have her father's mischievous smile, but it makes her eyes brighter and her smile stands out more.

Now I know what some of you here are thinking. Who's the father? I got that question a lot in higher learning and let me just tell you what I told them. Don't excuse me for being blunt but it's none of your damn business. I don't know if you could tell by the Mrs. part of Mrs. Freeman but me and her father are very much still together. I am deeply in love with this man, and he is deeply in love with me. He owns a very successful business and has a blossoming career in engineering. We had a child in school, and we wouldn't change it for anything. He actually is coming back here to get another degree in business finance. He plans to wear a suit every class. My baby is going to look stylish everywhere he goes. I know that's right.

Another question I almost always get asked is, "was it hard." Yes, it was. Physically, carrying a baby in a big stomach for hours on end up and down our university was draining. Getting up to use the bathroom every 30 minutes caused me to take attention away from class. Did I study for long hours while feeding my child? Yes. Did I wake up an hour or two earlier than the average student, so we had everything prepared for my mother to help watch her during my classes? Yes. Did we go out to the party? Sure. It wasn't as much as we would have preferred but the times we did go, we had fun. Did we watch our friends with their significant others have a good time? Yeah, sometimes. I was never outright jealous though. This is what came with being a parent and I feel it grounded me in more ways than one.

The world sees us collegiate parents as failures, but do failures end up earning a five-year degree in multiple studies? Would being a failure mean ending up with a degree in not just our interests but that of Honors status? Would being a failure mean not waking up every day with a new energized grind and hustle? I don't think so. Now it was hard. There were many days where we felt as if we could just fall and not make it. However,

our life just started. That potential fall is a part of our livelihood, and that livelihood now shall live vicariously through us to our daughter. I mentioned my mother earlier and I would also like to mention my father as well. He went out of retirement to help support us. He would come home, and I would be so grateful. His eyes were crimson, brown like my daughter's. Now, he is long gone from this earthly plane but every time I look into my daughter's eyes, I see the stunning, gorgeous, hard work my parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and my ancestors bestowed upon me to give to her. Now that's the definition of Black Excellence. When he passed away, he wrote a letter to me that I would like to share with you.

“Dear my little Tabby. If you are to read this, then my darling, my time has come towards God's golden hour, and he has called me back home. Over the years, I have seen the woman he destined for you to become. From your first steps after falling so many times to running down the street to catch the bus in the morning time. Your first science project. Your first dance. Your first heartbreak. Your first child. So many firsts that I am proud to say I was a witness to. Not only you but little Ana has well. You are raising her to be the spitting image of who I see in you. A resilient woman who no matter what a fighter is and will forever be my little Tabby. I know all you want right now is my bear hug and I know I can't do that for you anymore but just know. I will always watch over you and your little girl. I will protect you and God willing guide you to be the best you can be. I love you now and forever. See you in paradise my love.”

I love my family so much. There was more he said but those other words are too precious for anyone else to hear. I am the resiliency my ancestors dreamed of, and I am that foundation for life to continue. I am resilient, educated, a fighter and I am ready for what life throws towards me next. Hopefully, my boxing instincts kick back in, and I duck and weave those punches some. Thank you.

MARCUS

Good evening. I am Marcus Williams and I am mad as hell. What right does the Supreme Court have in taking away one of the only ways my people and other people of color can make it into college. My kids are gonna have to fight even HARDER, and they already were having to fight twice as hard, to get a chance. A chance to make something of themselves. It gives not just my kids but other kids the chance to succeed in life. Going to college for myself was a experience unparalleled, besides having my kids of course. I went to this school because it was closer to home and members of my hometown community excelled here. Without affirmative action, my life would have gone down a vastly different road. So, I am going to aid in the fight to bring it back.

The other day I got into a fight with a white coworker. He was like, “I am glad they did it. Now everyone is on equal playing fields, and no one is getting handouts.” Nigga

WHAT. I was like, number one, race has ALWAYS played a part in college admissions. The whole reason we got Historical Black colleges like Howard University or Spelman, is because we were not allowed in the same spaces as white people. Then when they decided to be “nice” and let us in with them, they were very selective in who appeared to help look the part. Secondly, affirmative action does not even give handouts. It is telling students in disenfranchised neighborhoods that we see you in a world where we normally wouldn’t. That was me. I was the kid who did all the clubs, played sports, and made straight A’s. Without affirmative action, I would have been passed over for mediocrity. Then he responded with, “well you’re one of the good ones so of course you’d make it.” I saw red and it took a few of my other co-workers to get me off him.

I say all this to say, this university became my home due to the chance to find someone who looked like me. I was seeked out and became an engineering major alongside several other black boys who never might have never seen the light of day here. It’s bullshitted the way society has regressed in the past couple of years and I pray I won’t have to lay my hands on anyone else. I am worried, strong minded, an engineer of the community and a pioneer in my heart.

NANISSA FURAHA

Salutations. I am Nanissa Furaha. That is Swahili for “delight.” I, too, am a mother and have been for quite some time now. I love all my children. Especially my Letitia. Me and her, some would say, are conjoined to the hip. Being a mother is one of the best opportunities this world has ever granted me, truly. I work in an office in a certain department. A good job here at the university that has allowed me to showcase I know my stuff. Being in the finance world, a black woman in the finance world, taking care of business and showing we are capable of such tasks is very rewarding. Speaking of rewards, I, per the guidelines presented to me as a university worker, have been allowed to take several classes over the years. I’m currently getting my master’s degree in business finance. Can you believe it!? It had always been a magnificent goal of mine, getting my master’s degree. It is more than a title or a sheet of paper though. It shows that no matter what this world can throw at you, I will always be on top of what I must do to make it. It has been a supreme honor God has allowed me to live the way that I do with the family support I do have. It wasn’t an easy task with Letitia getting hurt or me getting sick, but it was a rewarding one all the same. However, there was an immense downfall that dealt with my age and race that, looking back now, still hurts some. I have to be honest there.

I’m already the oldest, most qualified person in the room. I’m also the only black student there. The only one of African descent. The only one who experienced those Saturday morning clean ups with my kids. The only one who can tell apart dressing and stuffing. It amazes me when I’m talking to a coworker, and they have a shared experience with me, but we move. Something you should know about me before we continue is I go into a great deal of what life has offered me and what I have taken from it. However, I’d rather

be described as vivacious than too talkative. To me it means the same thing but on one side it's pleasant but on the other side it is unpleasant. Oh well, but there are a lot of facts to consider. But after seven years of trying to get my master's degree, I will be marching on that stage. I don't care if I have to roll across or if someone has to push me across. THIS December, I am walking across that stage. I know this is a reality now because I have had to buy my gown and hood. I earned this moment. Not just because of the past where I have shown over and over again why I am who I am, but I also say this because I have worked the hardest this semester in my class.

Speaking of the class, I'm the only black individual in this group of five that was put together. I know there are many differences between people, period. I know there are many differences due to gender and race and class structure. I know this. So, I kind of have a number of strikes when it comes to being in groups. You can call it a strike, or you can call it an advantage. I don't see it as an advantage. As an older person and a black individual, those aren't advantages in this society. So, in this particular class, we um... we had to do peer evaluations. That is where you judge each other based on performance and work. I was not surprised by most of the questions as they were geared towards my effort and worth ethic. It was a rating system of one to four with four being the highest. On some questions, two was the highest so we used the decimal system. I put myself down as four or two every time. I know my worth and my worth will always be at the top. A strike of this though was at the end, we can see the comments made by each other. Now there was this one girl who had left for three weeks to be in Hawaii and barely did any work while away. She didn't even tell us until last week. I fully expected her to get the lowest score but she in fact did not. I did. I am a bit too embarrassed to say what I got but just know it is not a score I would have ever expected. The question, "how were they to work with," was asked. One of the comments from my peers said "they were great to work with. However, they talk a lot and sometimes talk over people." After that, another question was asked. "Would you work with this person again?" I got a zero point seventy-five out of the whole number of two. It wasn't hurtful but it was surprisingly disappointing. After evaluating and thinking on who was on the team, my thoughts and interactions with them, and if my interactions were pleasantly accepting or could they have received my personality in totality. I... well I shed a few tears. We all have flaws. I just didn't think that garnered me the strike of being below bar. The one person who wasn't even there got all the praise and I was left to evaluate my one identity of who I am and what I bring to the table. I was thankful the four of us were mature enough to move over this hurdle without pause but I just can't get over this hurdle that being on a team resulted in zero point seventy-five out of the whole number of two. Is that the score society sees me as? More so than evaluating me... they tell you to work on these problems correctly, but they don't tell you where you got it wrong. How do you fix it?

I'll leave you with, I know myself and I know- sometimes it gets a little emotional. Sometimes it gets a little hard and sometimes that hurts. But I am glad it is my last semester because I will now have another degree to further myself and my education. Mine. All mine and there is nothing anyone can do, not even Karen in the counseling

office, to take that from you. There are times these things can put you down but other times it energizes you to be that person that everyone can see and that person who chooses to reflect and not settle. I am the black woman Michelle Obama references in her, “Hey Queen,” speech and I am the stature for no limitations. I am limitless, qualified, vivacious, powerful, and a queen. Thank you.

REED ELLIS

They always say the best is yet to come. Well, I am here! I am Reed Ellis, and I am so excited to end this piece on why I love being Black. There are a multitude of reasons each woven into my bloodstream. Each cell part of a prevalent history that goes back further than a measly 400 years. Further than the Pharaohs of Egypt even. I am the descendant of the son of Adam and Eve.

I love being black due to experiencing the diverse culture. Being black is a work of art. It makes my skin glow inside and out. I love the interaction with strangers just with a single nod like we are family. The conversations between random black ppl that don't involve words, just facial expressions are the best. The handshakes and hugs that make the infamous “cookouts” are worth a thousand memories. The funerals that aren't worth crying for cause the culture believes in the good times and not the bad. I love the way that we all assume that we've had the same experience growing up because we most likely did. I love the community we have and the sense of protection and accomplishment we have over one another in the workplace. I love how we can all agree that being black in America is a tough thing, but we wouldn't change our skin color if given the choice. Being black means being a part of the fight and the struggle but knowing we were gonna come out ok at the end.

I was taught at a young age that I am a part of richness. Not in monetary wealth, though my family lives comfortably, but richness in the world. Everything we touch, sing, praise, speak into existence and more is based solely on us. Others may take what we do and make it their own, but you can never outdo the original. We have worked our entire lives to show the world we are a part of it just like everyone else and we are a contribution to society. Slowly but surely, they have come around to witness and accept that. Not just in America but everywhere.

That's why I'm happy to be here, at college, in a place so full of rich identity. No one is alike but no one is alone. I have a vast network of friends who all worship differently, have different skin tones, and love who they love. I even have a few who are back for their masters, and who have already started raising families. We are at so many different points in our life that our blackness could be the only thing that connects us. But that's just it. We are fine with that connection because we are a part of a Tree that endlessly grows. Every baby born, every touchdown, every fight, every new opportunity presented to us by us, that all is a part of us. It's in us.

I am black, limitless. I am unapologetically black, unapologetically scared. I drive through life using faith; being friendly, compassionate, as well as a hard worker. Life has

taught me and continues to teach me how to be unapologetically hopeful, unapologetically me. I look in the mirror and I feel talented, gorgeous, exotic. My sense of being a hustler, and an innovator comes to frame and my past does not hurt my present nor future. I am also hurt, alarmed, triggered, genuine, surpassingly calm, well mannered, nice to a fault. All the while being gentle, kind, caring, explosive, real and honest. I have love for my sisters, and I have love for my brothers. This collegiate community is my second home away from home. I am a black first-generation college student ready to take on the world, one day at a time. I am a part of the Black Caucus.

Reflection

When I first contemplated writing an honors thesis, I was lost as to what I wanted to write about. My first sense of direction came from being an African American man in Kenya, living for three weeks as a member of a Black majority in Kenya rather than as a minority in my home country of the United States, as well as the fact that I was heavily involved in the Black community at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. However, I needed to move away from the familiarity of being an actor and had to choose to become a playwright before I finally found my direction with my thesis. I just listened to what other members of my Black community were saying around me, and I found my way into creating a script and an audio performance of what it means to be a Black American on this campus and in this moment of time.

Listening to other stories helped me reflect on my journey and where my own identity may lie. I learned that universally shared experiences correlates to one's identity. The entire time, every Black individual I listened to or interviewed always went back to the importance of community. Community impacted the lives of my all-Black actors and interviewees in a multitude of ways, both positive and negative. A theme that ran through all the interviews was a universal gain of going through something shared by other Black college-going Americans. "Cool," I thought, "I am going through something else but at the end of the day the thing that ties us together is the color of our skin and the history on our backs." Through that, we will always be connected.

There isn't much I would change about my thesis besides a few things here and there. In Reed's monologue, I would like to go back and fully record a solo version of it. For the audio production of Reed's monologue, I recorded three students, all at three different points in their

respective academic journeys. They did great but something more was missing. I wish I had recorded the monologue with just my voice and then added the final overlay of “We are The Black Caucus.” I also felt I could have gone even further by adding more interviews/monologues to the script. There are so many different aspects of Black identity and there are a multitude of stories to share. There is a sarcastic saying in the Black community that “there’s not two ways to be Black.” The saying is popular with Black people who commonly find themselves in majority white-occupied spaces, where stereotypes risk erasing all the variations of Black identity and reducing it to one single definition. I could have an endless script just with the sheer amount of stories needing to be told.

This thesis was a passion project. The metaphorical blood, sweat and tears poured into it created an environment of safety and warmth, which is a feeling I will hang on to forever. This project has sparked other writings currently in process, for example a play about three Black Americans, each representing different archetypes, who have crashed in the uncivilized lands in the Maasai Mara. Another piece I am potentially writing is all because of a member of a Latinx collegiate organization who listened in on one of the early interviews I conducted for the project. They were intrigued with what I was doing and was hoping I could do the same for them and interview the community of Latinx individuals on campus. They asked me to gather their stories and help correlate their identity to who they are. Knowing that my work can be inspirational and that others wish to see more of my approaches to writing is very rewarding.

The Black Caucus inspired me to see well past what I could do in life. As a child, I expected myself to become either a chef or an actor. In high school, I had to finally choose between the two. The first adult choice I ever made was to become an actor. I love acting and will fiercely pursue it with all I have, but it seems I have a knack for mentoring the younger

generation as well. I hope to build upon new foundations and new innovations. *The Black Caucus* propels me forward as a writer and creator, not just in the world but in my community. My thesis has shown me that through my greatest limits, I am capable. If I am capable, then everyone in life is capable. I am Isaiah Mark Owens, creator of *The Black Caucus*. Thank you.

APPENDIX A

For the interviews, I intended to go in with basic broad questions to get the conversation started, but depending on how the conversation went, I focused more specifically on certain aspects of my interviewee's stories. Below is a list of general questions I wrote to start the conversations. Also below are questions I pivoted to once the conversation led elsewhere. Going into the process, I had five focus fields: Christianity, multicultural backgrounds, colorism, racism, and the arts. These fields had assigned questions mentioned below as well.

Questions:

1. What's your class year and major/minor?
2. Tell me about yourself: What is your orientation/what do you identify as? Do you have any hobbies or passions? Where are you from? What is the demographic like?
3. Why did you choose UTC?
4. Being in a majority white space at UTC, what does it mean for you to be in a Black space?
5. Is there a specific memory you have that involved your skin color?
6. As someone of melanin quality who is of African descent, do or did you feel safe on campus?
7. Are you happy?

Focused Questions:

(A.) Christianity:

1. What has your relationship been with Christianity?
2. Is the community you grew up in predominantly Christian?

3. In your opinion do you feel like Christianity is big on campus?
4. Do you feel it's big in the Black community on campus?
5. What is Christianity ultimately to you?
6. What is your defining admiration of being Black?

(B.) Multicultural:

1. What is your ethnicity?
2. What is your Religion?
3. How do you maneuver the many unique spaces occupy yourself in?
4. Have you ever experienced prejudice from the Black community?
5. What is your opinion of the definition of colorism vs racism?
6. What is your defining admiration of being Black?

(C.) Colorism:

1. How do you define colorism?
2. When has colorism impacted you?
3. Do you feel colorism is a major factor in the Black Community in General?
4. Do you feel it's a major factor in the Community here?

5. What is your defining admiration of being Black?

(D.) Racism:

1. How do you define racism?
2. Have you ever experienced racism on this campus or felt like you were the target of racial profiling? If so, what did you feel at that moment? Did it open a level of vulnerability?
3. Looking back on that event/ any other, what do you feel about it now?
4. What is your defining admiration of being Black?

(E.) Arts:

1. Being a creative, how much of your culture is implemented into your craft?
2. Do you feel a sense of isolation being in an industry that is predominantly white? If so, how do you cope with that?
3. How do you respond to those who are against “race-bending” in the media and art world alike? The definition of race-bending is “Playing (acting) the role of, or casting someone in the role of, someone of different race or ethnicity” (
4. 4. Have you ever had a professional experience that others could never fully grasp or understand?
5. What is your defining admiration of being Black?

(F.) Workforce:

1. How long have you been in the workforce?
2. What has your experience been as a Black woman in your years of work?
3. Do you feel there is an extra layer of prejudices in being in a predominantly white office?
4. 4. What disconnects you from work when the day is over? For instance, what do you do once you leave work?
5. What is your defining admiration of being Black?

APPENDIX B

Examples and Structures of Interviews:

Questions for Ezekiel

1. What was it like growing up in the church?

Growing up in church, especially as a pastor's kid, came with its ups and downs, but ultimately, I am grateful for the way I was brought up. Being a Christian is already a challenging walk in this world but being a pastor's kid who has always been involved in church made that walk a little more challenging. I didn't do a lot of the things that typical middle and high schoolers do such as go on trips throughout the weekend, party, or go to many events outside of the school environment. But I still enjoyed my grade school years playing sports, being involved in many orgs, and even DJing games. Through church, I learned how to be a servant, how to work hard, how to be loyal, and how to stay true to myself. The characteristics that I learned growing up in church allowed me to enjoy school and life in my own way and presented me with opportunities that have placed me in the position I am in now in life.

2. What's a memory you have of being in the church?

I have too many memories to count from summer camps, conventions, community service, and many more. One memory that I recall was back in 2018 when I was privileged to play for my denomination's national women's conference as the music director. The convention took place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where I was able to play on a national stage. Through this opportunity, I met other great musicians and even had the opportunity to help with the youth by being a chaperone on the field trips and leading certain activities. This is one of my favorite memories of

being in church because even though I was there for church, I was able to branch out and serve my community while doing what I love as a musician.

3. What is Christianity to you and your Black individuality?

They both go hand and hand because God for me is a source of peace, hope, strength, and confidence. It's not a secret that this world is cruel and being black doesn't make it easier, but because I know I have God on my side, I have no reason to fear or fret. I know it is a very common scripture but it is true, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

Questions for Jazmine

1. Tell me about yourself.

My name is ----- . I am a first-generation college student from Nashville, Tennessee. I come from a diverse background as my parents were Muslim immigrants from Ethiopia. I was born as they were getting acclimated to the country, so it provided me with a unique experience.

Although we were fortunate enough to have everything we needed, I didn't come from a financially wealthy family so money and finances impacted much of my childhood and my college experience. Being Muslim immigrants in a post 9/11 country was a unique shared experience that all Muslims in America faced, especially to women who were openly Muslim which my mother and many of the women in my family were. These factors were just a few of the biggest influences on my life

2. How does your faith correlate to your identity?

My faith correlates to my identity as it has influenced almost every part of my life. Growing up, the Islamic faith wasn't taught to me as just a faith but rather a way of life. By the age of three I knew my Arabic alphabet and was able to recite some portions of our holy text while also understanding basic Islamic concepts like eating strictly with my right hand and the importance of the hijab. This was the norm in Muslim households that had strong Muslim parents as they wanted to teach the faith to their children. After moving from the Midwest to the South, my mother recognized the importance of an Islamic education so by the time I was in 1st grade I was enrolled in an Islamic private school for elementary school. Beyond that, I was placed in weekend Quran classes for memorization. These things facilitated my actual learning of the faith, which inherently impacted the way of life my mother and I lived. Dietary restrictions limited the foods we ate, rules impacted my association with the opposite gender, and even what I was able to watch on TV. An important factor that is especially important to understanding why my faith impacted me the way it did was also the cultural impact of being from an immigrant family that consisted of just me and my mother. Cultural differences between Americans and foreigners naturally creates a barrier in lifestyles that can only be broken down through the lived experience.

3. Do you have any memories being on campus that relate to your identity?

I have many memories on campus that relate to my identity. Being apart of the various organizations that correlated with my identity made my experience at UTC very memorable. The intersectionality of my identity allowed me to be a proud member of the Black Student Alliance, The African Student Association, The Muslim Student Association, and The Sister Circle. Each organization provided me with a unique community that allowed my identity to flourish. It also allowed me to bring my experiences that correlated with one identity to all the various groups as my lived experience was unique.

Actual Transcript of Interview

Sean's finished monologue

NOTE: The entire interview of Sean's became a monologue! We had a limited amount of time to interview, so after the preliminary questions, he immediately moved on to talking about his coming-out experience and how the relationships he established at UTC helped him feel at ease with his identity as a gay Black man. Due to the several layers he offered in the interview, I desired to include everything said so as not to lose the moments that mattered to him.

This is going to be so awkward. I'm Sean and I am a current Junior studying political science. My freshman year was just crazy to think about. We had Covid entering and so a lot of things I'm able to do now, we're null and void. Everyone seemed to be going through something and it was just a really dreary time. I even was going through something, and I am never one to really relish on what I'm going through.

I had four roommates then and one of them became a great friend really fast. His name was Caesar and he's Mexican. Because we were Black and Mexican and the other two guys were white, me and him naturally just hit it off. I still talk to those guys though sometimes to check in because they were cool too. We played frisbee out on the green every day after classes ended. Miss those guys. Me and Caesar hung out a lot and it got to the point we made a larger friend group based on our friendship. The school had so many restrictions at the time, so we all had to find ways to hang out together. All of us loved the outdoors and were athletes so every weekend we would go hiking up some wilderness trail. Especially Signal Mountain.

One weekend the other friends couldn't join us so me and Caesar went hiking alone. For some reason I picked up some vibes that he was nervous or something, but I just let it go. We went to a little watering hole for a break, and we made some small talk. Out of nowhere he turned around and kissed me. Before this I never felt attracted to guys before. I mean I noticed if someone was attractive, but I just thought that was an unspoken thing. I never had dated a girl, but my parents always assured me I'm just really into my studies and that I'll get with a girl when I become more open to it. When he kissed me, I jumped back and stared off into space. He had to have felt my awkwardness and suggested we start hiking back. We hiked back to his car and rode back home silently. We got back to the parking lot and before he got out of the car, I pulled him in and kissed him back. After that, we talked for hours. He talked about how he had always wanted to be out, but his family was very conservative, so he wanted to wait until college.

After that conversation, me and him started dating. The subject of me coming out never really was brought up. Especially in the early months because I felt it wasn't really anyone/ business. My family especially because they always gave me mixed signals on their opinions of gay people so I didn't know what would happen. Well, I didn't really have a choice because I was outed accidentally by a social media post.

There is an event called Coming Out Cookout hosted by Spectrum that me and Caesar went to. I was there for the food, but it felt kind of nice being around the community for the first time. Me and Caesar were still very much a secret, but I guess he didn't care like I didn't because it was so new and exciting. The campus photographer took a photo of us. (We were laughing because we put cake on each other's nose.) Now my mother follows every account from the school, and I guess one of the accounts posted it because she called me as soon as she saw it. I will never forget it. I answered the phone, and she immediately asked me point blank. She told me how she

saw the photo and everything. I of course denied it and she went on this religious rant. I didn't care what she thought but the conversation did remind me of being Christian. I kind of forgot about that aspect and what it meant now I was with a man.

I got to a really dark place where I shunned everyone out and honestly was ready to end it all at one point. I found myself in my closet physically speaking and I was in such a dark space. I felt like I took up a space God intended for someone else. I questioned everything I learned and even who I was. It was so bad I stole some pills from Caesar, and I had planned to take my own life. Luckily, he got to me in time, and I was hospitalized. I'm embarrassed he was the one to have found me but I'm also relieved. My parents and siblings came to town and on that hospital bed I came out to them. My siblings comforted me right away, but my parents were silent. My mom even left the room.

My dad got used to it pretty fast. He still is awkward, but he makes the effort. My mother doesn't though. She didn't outright disown me, but she practically shunned me. Me and Caesar no longer are officially together but we are still friends for life! We always tell each other the other is the one to get away so check on us again in 5 years.

I go to a suicide survivor meeting every week to discuss my feelings so I'm also doing good in life. To describe my head space now and who I am... I'd say I am now out and courageous in every sense of the word. Oh and brave because I don't think others would have made it through like I did unscathed to be honest. I'm also appreciative of my community which is both my one and only.

Questions for Shonda

1. Being a Creative, how much of your culture is implemented into your craft?
2. Do you feel a sense of isolation being in an industry predominantly non-menaliated? If so, how do you cope with that?
3. How do you respond to those who are against “race-bending” in the media and art world alike?
4. Was there a time in your craft where you experienced something others would never understand or get.
5. What is your defining admiration of being Black?
6. Who are some of your influences?
7. What are your plans as a black creative?
8. Describe who you are and identify as.
9. Any advice for others entering the black creative space.

Finished monologue, Shonda

To quote the Grammy and BET Award winning singer, Solange, “Don’t touch my hair, Don’t Touch my Hair.” Hello, I am Shonda. Growing up I always knew my life was for the Big Screen and Theatre. My life revolved around studying black actresses like Angela Bassett, Lynn Whitfield, and even Monique. Later, I’m now looking at Zendaya, Keke Palmer, and even Gabrielle Union who I feel is severely underrated. Sometimes I’d even study black actors like Denzel Washington. He was so fine in Malcolm X. Growing up I really thought he was Malcolm X until my mother told me he wasn’t. Crazy, Anyways, I felt the best way to pursue my dreams

was to go to college. I don't regret it but looking back there are quite a few moments I wish motivated me to go elsewhere.

There were often times where I felt feelings of isolation. In the duration of my entire college theater career, I was one of the few black individuals in the department. I won't reveal the number of black students but let's just say sometimes we either were going to middle school or fell short just of pre-k. We never felt uncomfortable per day because unfortunately we were used to being one out of a few in a white space. Most notably, one of the main things that always made us feel different is when it came to our hair and makeup for a show. Most of the time people just didn't even bother with coming up with ideas to style our hair or even the idea of a wig never came into play. I'd watch interviews of these beautiful black women who talked about this well into their careers. They spoke about how there never a black stylist on set or designer was so either they did it themselves or didn't bother to fight against the mold. It didn't really give me hope that could change here.

I will say that near the end of my time here, I did feel more seen with our costume designer. Me and him would have extensive conversations about this situation and what it meant for me as a black woman and him in a position to change the climate of inclusivity in the department. We had gotten the opportunity to film a televised theatrical piece where I was able to have my natural hair out and wear golden makeup that I felt complimented and supported my black features and personified how myself and ourselves look within the culture. Me and another black actor cried in our own rehearsal, but it wasn't tears of sadness. It was a joy. Me and him got to be our unapologetic selves in a space we finally could be comfortable in. The televised piece in question was very questionable with other themes and what the name itself brought; but now, it felt like a mini victory for me and the others.

Ever since then I have been making sure to audition for roles that celebrate my blackness and my identity without compromise. I know this industry likes us when we are down, but my goal is to portray us in the best shades of excellence possible. I am Angela Bassett, Lynn Whitfield, Viola Davis, Halle Berry while also being me for the future. An aspiration personified. I believe that is my ultimate goal in terms of who I want to be and who I am now. We are going to hustle until the wheels fall off and that is that. I am talented, gorgeous, a hustler, and an innovator. “Don’t Touch My Hair, Don’t Touch My Hair.” Thank you.

Questions for Tabitha

1. What is it like being a Collegiate Alum?
2. What was undergrad like for you?
3. Did you find your place on campus rather quickly or did you have to adjust?
4. You mentioned becoming a mother in undergrad. With your permission I’d like to know what that was like for you?
5. Would you say that familial support connected you to your roots? I know you touched on the fact briefly that your grandparents also helped in watching your daughter while you studied.
6. Do you have any advice for women who might go through what you went through?
7. Please describe yourself as it pertains to who you are.
8. Is there anything we might not have discussed that you feel will help connect others to who you are?

NOTE: By the third question, Mrs. Freeman turned the conversation towards her being a single mother in undergrad, so I naturally nurtured the questioning towards that experience. The

university doesn't publicly reveal the statistics for students currently pregnant or who have given birth, so the conversation turned into a journey of new and old. She relished what her days were like and what is new for current students. Something that she didn't have as a student for example is the "New Mother's Room" located in the university center lobby which is recently built. This interviewee graduated almost a decade ago so a lot of school support looked different.

Finished monologue, Tabitha:

Hello and good afternoon. I am Mrs. Tabitha Freeman and I'm so sorry if my voice is a bit high-pitched today. I am just so excited because it is my daughter's 6th birthday! This morning she woke me up by jumping up and down my bed. Growing up we weren't allowed to do that, and she isn't usually either but today I let her have a freebie. So yeah, after this, I am going to go pick her up from school, take her for ice cream, and then I'm driving her and her friends to the skating rink. A full afternoon day's plan but I am honored to be speaking with you today before that venture. When I had Anastasia, it was the best day of my life. Well before I got to that part, yes, I did get pregnant in college. It's there that it happened and so I was a pregnant mother by age 19. However, when I found out, I ran around to all my friends yelling, "We are having a baby! It's going to be a little girl. I can just feel it!" And I was right. We did have a little baby girl no heavier than seven pounds. She has my eyes. Such pretty eyes and she still does. She does have her father's mischievous smile, but it makes her eyes brighter and her smile stands out more.

Now I know what some of you here are thinking. Who's the father? I got that question a lot in higher learning and let me just tell you what I told them. Don't excuse me for being blunt but it's none of your damn business. I don't know if you could tell by the Mrs. part of Mrs. Freeman but me and her father are very much still together. I am deeply in love with this man, and he is

deeply in love with me. He owns a very successful business and has a blossoming career in engineering. We had a child in school, and we wouldn't change it for anything. He actually is coming back here to get another degree in business finance. He plans to wear a suit every class. My baby is going to look stylish everywhere he goes. I know that's right.

Another question I almost always get asked is, "was it hard?" Yes, it was. Physically, carrying a baby in a big stomach for hours on end up and down our university was draining. Getting up to use the bathroom every 30 minutes caused me to take attention away from class. Did I study for long hours while feeding my child? Yes. Did I wake up an hour or two earlier than the average student, so we had everything prepared for my mother to help watch her during my classes? Yes. Did we go out to the party? Sure. It wasn't as much as we would have preferred but the times we did go, we had fun. Did we watch our friends with their significant others have a good time? Yeah, sometimes. I was never outright jealous though. This is what came with being a parent and I feel it grounded me in more ways than one.

The world sees us collegiate parents as failures, but do failures end up earning a five-year degree in multiple studies? Would being a failure mean ending up with a degree in not just our interests but that of Honors status? Would being a failure mean not waking up every day with a new energized grind and hustle? I don't think so. Now it was hard. There were many days where we felt as if we could just fall and not make it. However, our life just started. That potential fall is a part of our livelihood, and that livelihood now shall live vicariously through us to our daughter. I mentioned my mother earlier and I would also like to mention my father as well. He went out of retirement to help support us. He would come home, and I would be so grateful. His eyes were crimson, brown like my daughter's. Now, he is long gone from this earthly plane but every time I look into my daughter's eyes, I see the stunning, gorgeous, hard work my parents, grandparents,

great-grandparents, and my ancestors bestowed upon me to give to her. Now that's the definition of Black Excellence. When he passed away, he wrote a letter to me that I would like to share with you.

“Dear my little Tabby. If you are to read this, then my darling, my time has come towards God's golden hour, and he has called me back home. Over the years, I have seen the woman he destined for you to become. From your first steps after falling so many times to running down the street to catch the bus in the morning time. Your first science project. Your first dance. Your first heartbreak. Your first child. So many firsts that I am proud to say I was a witness to. Not only you but little Ana has well. You are raising her to be the spitting image of who I see in you. A resilient woman who no matter what a fighter is and will forever be my little Tabby. I know all you want right now is my bear hug and I know I can't do that for you anymore but just know. I will always watch over you and your little girl. I will protect you and God willing guide you to be the best you can be. I love you now and forever. See you in paradise my love.”

I love my family so much. There was more he said but those other words are too precious for anyone else to hear. I am the resiliency my ancestors dreamed of, and I am that foundation for life to continue. I am resilient, educated, a fighter and I am ready for what life throws towards me next. Hopefully, my boxing instincts kick back in, and I duck and weave those punches some.

Thank you.

APPENDIX C

AUGUST WILSON METHOD:

This academic year, I was re-introduced to methods that August Wilson utilized in his writings, most notably his writings for what is known as the “Pittsburgh Cycle.” Ten plays that show the Black American experience across several decades. August Wilson fully immersed himself in different areas where he showcased his own originality and ingenuity in his work. He frequently sat in a coffee shop and simply listened to the people and sounds around him. He developed some of his best writings by observing how other people spoke and lived.

I followed the technique of August Wilson, and I went to several locations such as McDonald’s and the community library in my hometown of Murfreesboro, Tennessee as well as the office where I work at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. There, I sat and listened to the stories of the people sitting around me. I jotted down notes of what they were saying and used those to curate monologues. Instead of directly interviewing the individuals and potentially pushing their words towards a different narrative, I just talked with them so they could speak freely.

Notes for Nanissa

(11-04-2022)

Location: Office Space at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

I am a student worker at the university and one of my co-workers, who happened to be a older Black woman walked up to me and needed someone to vent with. She’s usually a calm headed individual, so I took her away from the office and just talked outside on a bench. There

she talked about how she's graduating and is so excited about it. Then she went into detail of how hurt she was due to a recent peer evaluation. Before she continued talking, I asked if it was alright to record the tail end of the conversation because what she was saying felt so real. Here is the transcript, most of which was used in the final script, as well as side notes I took that day.

Notes:

1. Older woman who works and attends the school as a student. She is graduating this upcoming December.
2. Is usually very confident but due to a low percentage from a peer evaluation, she is upset.
3. The speech of the woman is unique, and the delivery, as well as the way she communicates her ideals. Her ability to speak on one subject, jump to another subject, and then jump once more, come back to the first subject, and then circle all the way around to finally come to her own conclusion, which creates a cohesive nature of chaotic identity. I think this may work well with *The Black Caucus* as a whole.
4. She said something very interesting towards the end of our conversation. She said something along the lines of, "More so than evaluating me they inform and tell you to work on these problems correctly; in the correct manner, but they don't tell you where you got it wrong." This hurt and confusion can really transpire through the peace, especially dealing with her being an older woman and society, and how she's had experience and has lived through history. I am using this 100%.
5. If used, she wishes for me to use the name Nanissa Furaha. It means "happiness" in Swahili and she wants her identity at the end to be happy. Happy she graduated and happy she was ready to take the leap.

6. She likes to joke about cultural differences with her white co-workers. For example, she cited the fun argument of dressing vs stuffing.
7. Doesn't want to be seen as a victim, but as someone who "excels past expectations of others."

Finished monologue, Nanissa:

Salutations. I am Nanissa Furaha. That is Swahili for "delight." I, too, am a mother and have been for quite some time now. I love all my children. Especially my Letitia. Me and her, some would say, are conjoined to the hip. Being a mother is one of the best opportunities this world has ever granted me, truly. I work in an office in a certain department. A good job here at the university that has allowed me to showcase I know my stuff. Being in the finance world, a black woman in the finance world, taking care of business and showing we are capable of such tasks is very rewarding. Speaking of rewards, I, per the guidelines presented to me as a university worker, have been allowed to take several classes over the years. I'm currently getting my master's degree in business finance. Can you believe it!? It had always been a magnificent goal of mine, getting my master's degree. It is more than a title or a sheet of paper though. It shows that no matter what this world can throw at you, I will always be on top of what I must do to make it. It has been a supreme honor God has allowed me to live the way that I do with the family support I do have. It wasn't an easy task with Letitia getting hurt or me getting sick, but it was a rewarding one all the same. However, there was an immense downfall that dealt with my age and race that, looking back now, still hurts some. I have to be honest there.

I'm already the oldest, most qualified person in the room. I'm also the only black student there. The only one of African descent. The only one who experienced those Saturday morning clean

ups with my kids. The only one who can tell apart dressing and stuffing. It amazes me when I'm talking to a coworker, and they have a shared experience with me, but we move. Something you should know about me before we continue is I go into a great deal of what life has offered me and what I have taken from it. However, I'd rather be described as vivacious than too talkative. To me it means the same thing but on one side it's pleasant but on the other side it is unpleasant. Oh well, but there are a lot of facts to consider. But after seven years of trying to get my master's degree, I will be marching on that stage. I don't care if I have to roll across or if someone has to push me across. THIS December, I am walking across that stage. I know this is a reality now because I have had to buy my gown and hood. I earned this moment. Not just because of the past where I have shown over and over again why I am who I am, but I also say this because I have worked the hardest this semester in my class.

Speaking of the class, I'm the only black individual in this group of five that was put together. I know there are many differences between people, period. I know there are many differences due to gender and race and class structure. I know this. So, I kind of have a number of strikes when it comes to being in groups. You can call it a strike, or you can call it an advantage. I don't see it as an advantage. As an older person and a black individual, those aren't advantages in this society. So, in this particular class, we um... we had to do peer evaluations. That is where you judge each other based on performance and work. I was not surprised by most of the questions as they were geared towards my effort and worth ethic. It was a rating system of one to four with four being the highest. On some questions, two was the highest so we used the decimal system. I put myself down as four or two every time. I know my worth and my worth will always be at the top. A strike of this though was at the end, we can see the comments made by each other. Now there was this one girl who had left for three weeks to be in Hawaii and barely did any work while

away. She didn't even tell us until last week. I fully expected her to get the lowest score but she in fact did not. I did. I am a bit too embarrassed to say what I got but just know it is not a score I would have ever expected. The question," how were they to work with," was asked. One of the comments from my peers said "they were great to work with. However, they talk a lot and sometimes talk over people." After that, another question was asked. "Would you work with this person again?" I got a zero point seventy-five out of the whole number of two. It wasn't hurtful but it was surprisingly disappointing. After evaluating and thinking on who was on the team, my thoughts and interactions with them, and if my interactions were pleasantly accepting or could they have received my personality in totality. I... well I shed a few tears. We all have flaws. I just didn't think that garnered me the strike of being below bar. The one person who wasn't even there got all the praise and I was left to evaluate my one identity of who I am and what I bring to the table. I was thankful the four of us were mature enough to move over this hurdle without pause but I just can't get over this hurdle that being on a team resulted in zero point seventy-five out of the whole number of two. Is that the score society sees me as? More so than evaluating me... they tell you to work on these problems correctly, but they don't tell you where you got it wrong. How do you fix it?

I'll leave you with, I know myself and I know- sometimes it gets a little emotional. Sometimes it gets a little hard and sometimes that hurts. But I am glad it is my last semester because I will now have another degree to further myself and my education. Mine. All mine and there is nothing anyone can do, not even Karen in the counseling office, to take that from you. There are times these things can put you down but other times it energizes you to be that person that everyone can see and that person who chooses to reflect and not settle. I am the black woman

Michelle Obama references in her, “Hey Queen,” speech and I am the stature for no limitations. I am limitless, qualified, vivacious, powerful, and a queen. Thank you.

Notes for Tony and Maya

(06-14-23)

Location: McDonalds

One of the biggest issues facing the Black community is the topic of colorism. Colorism is the ideal that the lighter shade of melanin skin is more societal acceptable than darker shades. It was genuinely pure luck and ear hustling that brought me to this topic. Instead of it being the brother **and** sister perspective, it was just a mother’s perspective with her children. Apparently, the older brother called the younger sister a “dark monkey” and the mother was explaining why that was wrong. She mentioned how when she was younger, her brother was bullied for being dark-skinned. She also said it made no difference to white people what color we are when it’s dark.

The discussion they had inspired me to write about a brother and sister perspective. Growing up in my own household, I was the lighter child and my sister was the darker so I involved some ties from our younger years to help create the dynamic to bounce between. A big fun one is our love for Fanta soda which is in the piece. Both of my parents were obtuse towards colorism and though one was dark skinned as well, for years my sister lived in silence until one day she didn’t. She has been a steady advocate outside the collegiate space to bring awareness to

it so parts of her were curated in the piece as well. Everything is from that moment at McDonald's ordering a McDouble and my sister's and my shared memories.

McDonalds Notes:

Note: I have abbreviated some of the original entries that served more as just personal thoughts and nothing that led towards any development with *The Black Caucus*.

1. Family eating ice cream together. The mom is eating hers in a cup of sprite. I am intrigued to say the least.
2. The mother starts talking to her kids about colorism. This is very ironic with me being here but here we are. She explains colorism is wrong and that the brother should be nicer to his sister.
3. There's an old black man reading a book to himself and drinking a coffee quietly.
4. The workers, mostly all Black and one white woman, are in a rush in the kitchen. The cashier has a nice smile though.
5. The old man just got up and left. He scooted in the chair he was sitting. He seems to take in the moments in life that matter. Perhaps I can write about that in a metaphorical exit. Like how life can be as simple as pushing a chair in as you leave behind no trace of yourself. I like that.
6. The brother apologizes to his sister for calling her a monkey and they hug. It's kinda sweet if it wasn't for the ice cream floating in the sprite.
7. If I go the colorism route, I need to find that tie in with collegiate life. Also, which perspective do I go in towards the correct monologue. I don't want to lean too heavy into one side of the argument and vice versa.

Finished monologue, Tony:

Yo. I'm Tony. Maya's big brother. I'm a Junior and she is now a sophomore... I think. Yeah, she's gonna be a sophomore. I got an athletics scholarship for tennis, and she seemed to like the school, so she followed me here. Growing up, me and her were like fire and ice. I was an introvert, and she was an extrovert. Everyone adored her, as they should. I mean, she's great. She got straight As, did a lot of clubs and seemed to be a magnet wherever she went. Our parents adored her, and she was my dad's favorite. I was close to it mom but me and my dad didn't get along often. He would try and compare me to her on a daily basis and felt my work, which was similar to hers, was lacking. He made me practice for hours on end and truthfully left me resenting him more days than others.

I never realized my skin color until there was an incident at school. A bunch of boys, white, Black, Mexican, you name it. They walked past me and started calling me a bunch of names. I didn't know why they targeted me specifically until they called me a Tar Baby. Then I realized it was because I was darker than everyone else who was around. I was upset, no I was angry at the fact I can be singled out like that. And by other Black boys? I was in desperate need of a wakeup call, and it seems that was it.

Now my sister may tell it differently, but I didn't go home and cry. My mom just knew something was wrong with me. It got to the point where she yelled at me to tell her, and I did. I kid you not, the next day she drove me and my sister to school and got out with a bat. She pulled me by the arm and told me to point at the boys who did it. I did and she sent me off to class. I don't know what she did, but I know they didn't mess with me after that.

I didn't learn to love being Black until college. My skin tone makes me a sort of anomaly that only a few others in the world can relate to. Here, a lot of my peers don't see how dark I am. They see me as a Black man trying to make it in the world as they are. I walk through campus full of strides and I strive to be the GOAT. The "Greatest of all Time." I am a part of many different multicultural groups on campus so other students who come here can love how to love their blackness. I'm not ashamed to say my skin is beautiful and can earn its own degree. I am in a league of my own. I am the G.O.A.T, loved, and accepting.

Finished monologue, Maya:

I'm Tony's sister, Maya. We're only a year apart. He's a Junior this year while I'm a sophomore. Growing up, I loved my older brother. He was my direct influence, and I learned a lot from him. Sometimes me and him would bike down to a nearby store and buy two sodas and orange slices: the candy. He would drink purple soda and I would down some orange Fanta soda. He and my mother both were the only dark-skins of the family, but I never really paid much attention to it. Me and my father were light-skinned along with most of our extended family.

When we were younger, in school there was an incident where he was picked on one day for being dark-skinned. He was walking down the hall and a group of students with all different ethnicities called him a Tar Baby. He came home crying and the next day my mother came to school with a bat and scared the boys to death. That night she pulled me aside and made me promise I'd never treat him any different. Of course, I would not. He was my brother, and we

bled the same. At the time I thought to myself, “they would’ve called me the same thing. I mean we are both Black. They just saw him first.” But I agreed and kept pushing.

Now, I realize that kind of thinking wasn’t right. Not that I was completely wrong in thinking I could have also been discriminated against, but I did the very thing she asked me not to and alienated his experience. What he went through was terrible. So terrible that he cried himself to sleep that night and I just remember the screaming that gave me pain. Ever since then I have worked on myself through my courses, I’m an Africana Studies major, to wishes undo any promotions I have about colorism in my community.

I am light skin, and I am proud of my blackness. Me being light doesn’t negate my blackness whatsoever and I do wish people get that. However, I also feel we should discuss the fact that in society we could be seen as the safe choices in life. We are light enough to accommodate societal terms and sometimes my brothers and sisters who are of a different, darker shades are left out. No matter how hard the conversation may get or be critical, it’s time to unravel and work towards a united front. I love you, Tony.

Forever and always, your little sis, Maya.

Notes for Marcus’ Monologue

07- 03- 2023

Location: Outside the Murfreesboro Public Library

While I was back home for a break, the supreme court decided to end Affirmative Action in colleges. This was a powerful tool that allowed Black students and other people of color the chance to be seen when in other regards they might not have been. This was a hit to the

community where people who didn't even attend college spoke out about it. While I was at the library working, I overheard construction workers on a break discussing a fight that broke out between one of them and another worker. He spoke about his frustrations with Affirmative Action and how obtuse his co-worker was. I walked over and asked for more clarifications (after informing him of what I was doing). See below for some of the general notes I took to help create the writing:

1. The worker seemed to have just gotten into a fight with his co-worker. He said some racial incognitos that prompted the worker to fight him.
2. The worker says he was discussing the new case when the coworker (gonna say Bob) went on a rant about how it was unfair to begin with and he's excited about it going away.
3. The coworker (Marcus) told him how it helped him out and why he got an engineering degree. He also spoke on how college for him was transformative and others deserve that chance.
4. Bob rebutted every response and it got pretty heated. He even said, "Well you're one of the good ones so of course you'd make it." (This ended with a punch to the face).
5. Neither are getting fired but Bob has been relocated.
6. Marcus is also a dad and wishes things would change for the better for his kids.
7. Marcus also spoke about Clarence Thomas, but I left this out.

Finished monologue, Marcus Williams:

Good evening. I am Marcus Williams, and I am mad as hell. What right does the Supreme Court have in taking away one of the only ways my people and other people of color can make it into

college. My kids are going to have to fight even HARDER, and they already were having to fight twice as hard, to get a chance. A chance to make something of themselves. It gives not just my kids but other kids the chance to succeed in life. Going to college for myself was a experience unparalleled, besides having my kids of course. I went to this school because it was closer to home and members of my hometown community excelled here. Without affirmative action, my life would have gone down a vastly different road. So, I am going to aid in the fight to bring it back.

The other day I got into a fight with a white coworker. He was like, "I am glad they did it. Now everyone is on equal playing fields, and no one is getting handouts." Nigga WHAT. I was like, number one, race has ALWAYS played a part in college admissions. The whole reason we got Historical Black colleges like Howard University or Spelman, is because we were not allowed in the same spaces as white people. Then when they decided to be "nice" and let us in with them, they were very selective in who appeared to help look the part. Secondly, affirmative action does not even give handouts. It is telling students in disenfranchised neighborhoods that we see you in a world where we normally wouldn't. That was me. I was the kid who did all the clubs, played sports, and made straight A's. Without affirmative action, I would have been passed over for mediocrity. Then he responded with, "well you're one of the good ones so of course you'd make it." I saw red and it took a few of my other co-workers to get me off him.

I say all this to say, this university became my home due to the chance to find someone who looked like me. I was seeked out and became an engineering major alongside several other black boys who never might have never seen the light of day here. It's bullshitted the way society has

regressed in the past couple of years and I pray I won't have to lay my hands on anyone else. I am worried, strong minded, an engineer of the community and a pioneer in my heart.

APPENDIX D

The first of these monologues is based on a personal anecdote and the poem I wrote as a reaction to that experience. The second monologue is a work of pure fiction.

Demarco

Last summer (2022) there was a situation between faculty and orientation leaders where prejudice was exhibited. The orientation leaders were all Black and the faculty were white. Seeing as I was there and one of the main individuals involved, it felt needless to interview anyone else about their feelings. This is also the first time I ever cried in front of people in over 8 years and felt vulnerable in a safe space. After speaking to a therapist for the first time, I wrote a poem to decipher my thoughts and true feelings about the situation. From there I took that and wrote a piece on vulnerability as a Black man in the predominately white space.

The Grasses' Eyes

— Her eyes were wild and yet a stone in the space of the meadow.

All the bright green grass that surrounded her was swaying amongst the joys of the wind.

They called out to each other like a whistling man who had just found his kin.

The wind picked on the whistle and started making its own tune. The tune that turned a thousand countries.

She marched onward in a heap and a mound, thus trampling the grass now turned to stone.

The mirrors of her eyes and the grass become the shunning of a new, and a relevancy of the old.

Injustice tries to push through her lips and ultimately wins the gold.

In the wake, leaves a grass. Once colorful, colorless and old.

In the wake leaves a grass. Torn and never to be fully healed again.

In the wake leaves. —

Finished monologue, Demarco:

I can still hear the roars and screams of the white people sometimes when I sleep or daydream in class. Or at least that's what I heard in my mind when it happened. A reality that could have developed into another reality that was real. However, this thought, and this incident truly wasn't real. It was a spectacle. My name is Demarco. This incident that changed my perspective and view on life happened over the summer. It was hot out and we were sweating the moment we stepped outside. We, as in me and my colleagues at the time. My friends. It was so hot out I think even the a/c units were out for a couple of hours. There was this bright and great idea to just embrace the heat and go out and have some fun. So, we did what any other college aged person would do. We had a water gun fight. In our group chat we invited the entire crew to come out and just be kids again but only we, the black people, had shown up. Well one of our white friends did show up but she always does nothing new there.

We really were just having such a great day. That feeling of childhood innocence we always heard about in school just propelled us further and further to have fun. I am a very imaginative person, so my own imagination just exponentially grew tenfold. One minute we were on the beaches of Costa Rica and next we are under the waters of Atlantis. Another minute goes by, and

I am a stormtrooper from Star Wars. God, it had been so long since I have played tagged. We were having so much fun that even a photographer nearby saw us and took photo after photo. The smiles on our faces never actually left our faces. The water chases, the music, the vibes. It honestly felt like a scene out of a 90s film. Well, that 90s film vibe swiftly turned into a four-hundred-year-old reality. A white woman who looked to be in her early thirties but had the voice of a veteran not much older than fifty marched towards us and started to berate us. Our smiles formed into confused looks and expressions. Our eyes never leave the hateful gaze of her but meeting each other's at the very same time. Lie after lying spewed from her heart and mouth.

“You have been told to stop. So, this is your final warning.”/

When? We talked with the management, and they said it was alright. /

“You have disturbed the peace. This is your final warning.”/

What? They said it was fine. What's wrong, why can we-/

“Stop being a Nigga and bow down to me.”

That last part she didn't say but it was what we felt. Being black, respecting boundaries, having fun, being ourselves, resulted in an envious hatred of lies we ourselves can never accumulate. That furious fire behind her eyes resulted in the empty abyss of our own. We were stuck for weeks in a mind game of your fault, our fault, who's fault. I even, for the first time, discussed my thoughts with a therapist. I never was taught how to properly display my thoughts and emotions, but this intruder took that from me. On the one hand it opened the door for me to find trust in someone. I had never spoken to a therapist, barely even a counselor, and now I speak with them every so often. Everyone, especially the black community, needs to look more in therapy. It can

be seen as less than taboo, but it truly helps. On the other hand, though, I was forced to confront myself in a situation I was already confronted in.

Now the matter was squared away with a thousand apologies. I'm Sorry/ it was my fault/ you got it all wrong/ I'm sorry/ it was so hard growing up/ excuse/excuse/ excuse/ excuse/ excuse. To be frank and honest, we are tired as hell of excuses. The worst part was that it had to have happened here. It happened in our safe space. The place where we learn to grow and fail to hide. How can rhetoric of that extreme nature breach the walls that are within these sacred grounds? Was it already here that it personified itself to be what it is? A failure of the systems put in place or is it the equivalence that history is always so desperate to relieve. How am I to react to such a cynical position than to accept those apologies and move on. Are we truly at a point in time to move those boundaries and those in positions of power or are we to settle? I'm getting mixed signals but never mixed accords. The diagnosis of that day was a little black boy bruised on the playground. The bruise being the symptoms of and supreme questioning. I am hurt, alarmed, triggered, genuine, surpassingly calm, well mannered, nice to a fault, and sick and tired of being sick and tired. Thank you.

Reed

Reed is pure fiction, but I felt it was important to do a few things for the culmination of the piece. He is a revisit of the past identities discussed throughout the project. If you notice in the interviewed monologues, I ended each with them describing who they were as a person. I used those to create the "Reed" persona - who he is and what lies ahead of him.

I also used Reed as a personification for *The Black Caucus*. Throughout the script, you see the collective maneuvering of thought and identity transform into community. A lot of the

Black identity deals with shared experience and shared output so therefore, it was important to have someone others can more definitely relate to as they think back on what made who they were in college.

The only real-life acquisition input into the character was the first-generation scholar aspect. The identity of a first generation was briefly touched on in the anonymous interview however, with him having adoptive parents, he was in a sort of weird first generation and isn't. So, I used this opportunity to go deep into that realm. As of my first year, 2019, UTC had "about 25 percent—or approximately 2,200—of UTC undergraduates are first-generation" (Stafford). I also feel as if they enter a new realm and the metaphorical sense to be the first and to cultivate who you are without the background of others is a nice way to exit the script presented. New doors are open that years of ancestry didn't have the chance to cross so what impact is that on a person is such an interesting path to write about.

Finished Monologue, Reed Ellis:

They always say the best is yet to come. Well, I am here! I am Reed Ellis, and I am so excited to end this piece on why I love being Black. There are a multitude of reasons each woven into my bloodstream. Each cell part of a prevalent history that goes back further than a measly 400 years. Further than the Pharaohs of Egypt even. I am the descendant of the son of Adam and Eve.

I love being Black due to experiencing the diverse culture. Being Black is a work of art. It makes my skin glow inside and out. I love the interaction with strangers just with a single nod like we are family. The conversations between random Black people that don't involve words, just facial expressions are the best. The handshakes and hugs that make the infamous "cookouts" are worth a thousand memories. The funerals that aren't worth crying for cause the culture

believes in the good times and not the bad. I love the way that we all assume that we've had the same experience growing up because we most likely did. I love the community we have and the sense of protection and accomplishment we have over one another in the workplace. I love how we can all agree that being black in America is a tough thing, but we wouldn't change our skin color if given the choice. Being Black means being a part of the fight and the struggle but knowing we were going to come out ok at the end.

I was taught at a young age that I am a part of richness. Not in monetary wealth, though my family lives comfortably, but richness in the world. Everything we touch, sing, praise, speak into existence and more is based solely on us. Others may take what we do and make it their own, but you can never outdo the original. We have worked our entire lives to show the world we are a part of it just like everyone else and we are a contribution to society. Slowly but surely, they have come around to witness and accept that. Not just in America but everywhere.

That's why I'm happy to be here, at college, in a place so full of rich identity. No one is alike but no one is alone. I have a vast network of friends who all worship differently, have different skin tones, and love who they love. I even have a few who are back for their masters, and who have already started raising families. We are at so many different points in our life that our blackness could be the only thing that connects us. But that's just it. We are fine with that connection because we are a part of a Tree that endlessly grows. Every baby born, every touchdown, every fight, every new opportunity presented to us by us, that all is a part of us. It's in us.

I am Black, limitless. I am unapologetically Black, unapologetically scared. I drive through life using faith; being friendly, compassionate, as well as a hard worker. Life has taught me and continues to teach me how to be unapologetically hopeful, unapologetically me. I look in the

mirror and I feel talented, gorgeous, exotic. My sense of being a hustler, and an innovator comes to frame and my past does not hurt my present nor future. I am also hurt, alarmed, triggered, genuine, surpassingly calm, well mannered, nice to a fault. All the while being gentle, kind, caring, explosive, real and honest. I have love for my sisters, and I have love for my brothers. This collegiate community is my second home away from home. I am a Black first-generation college student ready to take on the world, one day at a time. I am a part of the Black Caucus.

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