BLacKting: The Inseparable Act of Being Black and Acting: For the Magical Negro

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BLacKting:
The Inseparable Act of Being Black and Acting:
For the Magical Negro

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Theatre

by

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Wiley College
Bachelor of Arts in English 2016

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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ABSTRACT

I am honored to present my Thesis for my M.F.A. in Theatre, in the form of a multidimensional project, drawing inspiration from the structure of Moby Dick by Herman Melville. As an undergraduate, the structure of Moby Dick intrigued me as it defies the form we call “a novel.” The book includes traditional prose, an entire play, verses of poetry, and even an essay. The structure of Moby Dick further influenced my love for Speech and Debate, especially around the event of Program Oral Interpretation (POI). POI places multiple genres of literature in conversation with each other and centers them around a single argument. I am using a similar approach in this thesis work, through multiple frames including: my graduate training as an actor and playwright, as well as my prior experience in Speech and Debate, Spoken Word piety, and Hip-Hop music.

During my graduate studies, I have pursued an M.F.A. in Theatre with a dual emphasis in Playwriting and Acting. In that pursuit, I balanced learning the techniques and skills of a theatre creator with learning the life skill of navigating a predominantly white space that, historically, is not designed for my success. Ultimately, this journey led me to discover my mission as a theatre artist, which is “to create theatre that lessens the distance between human beings.” This credo was taught to me by Professor Amy Herzberg, and I further suggest good theatre can help Black bodies like mine exist beyond stereotypical tropes and embolden our voices.

As a theatre artist, I have come to understand I cannot separate my Blackness from my performance as an actor and storyteller, and have come to fully embrace my identity as a successful Blacktor. A Blacktor, or Black actor, is a black actor who must perform their identity to survive in an environment not made for them. This thesis outlines my path on how I not only survived, but found my authentic voice and my artistic path in this environment.
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Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior, Mom and Dad and the Ashford family, University of Arkansas Theatre Department, James Logan Forensics, Wiley College Great Debaters, Youth Speaks Poetry Slam, San Diego Fringe Festival, TheatreSquared, Nate Parker Film Institute, Denzel Washington.
DEDICATION

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INTRODUCTION

Prologue

In Spring 2016, I graduated with a Bachelors of Arts in English from the Historical Black College in Marshall, Texas, Wiley College. Prior to attending graduate school I had absolutely no formal training in Film or Theatre. Rather, I was a multi-national champion forensics competitor in Speech and Debate. Because there is no post-collegiate equivalent to Speech and Debate, the craft that I had spent ten years developing had come to an end. I was a Speech and Debate nerd since 2005, from public forum debate, to impromptu speaking, to interpretive events, I loved everything the activity had to offer. My favorites, however, were the Program of Oral Interpretation (POI) events. In POI, the participant has the chance to research literature and create an argument as to why this piece of literature is necessary for our culture to extrapolate. Creating a well thought out argument as to why a piece of literature can benefit society was intriguing to me. I also believe this framework of, and experience with, Speech and Debate shaped my theatrical and cinematic storytelling before pursuing my M.F.A.

My process of getting into the University of Arkansas M.F.A. theatre program was brutally beautiful. While still a senior at Wiley College, I auditioned at the 2016 University Resident Theatre Association (URTAS) in Chicago, where hundreds of prospects audition for the top M.F.A. programs in the world. The process includes callbacks, final callbacks, and ultimately offers to a graduate program that can shape your entire career in the entertainment industry. Though seemingly unfortunate at the time, I was rejected by premiere programs such as Yale, Juilliard, and NYU. However, I made final callbacks for USC and Penn State. Ironically, I did not get called back by the University of Arkansas. I found my way to the M.F.A. acting program after I read their packet at URTAS and saw the package the University of Arkansas had to
offer—including three courses that highly intrigued me: Meisner technique, Creating a One Person Show, and Acting for the Camera. Additionally, the school offered a Graduate Assistantship with a stipend and full tuition remission. Naturally, I thought it would be a great opportunity to be funded through my training and an opportunity to develop my craft, regardless of location. Although, I did not get a call back from University of Arkansas, my Wiley College debate teammate, Drake Pough, did, and when he was done with his callback he told me the room number where the University of Arkansas recruiter was holding call-backs. I asked Drake to tell Arkansas that I was in the hallway and just wanted another chance to show them what I got. This was literally my Will Smith Pursuit of Happiness moment. How bad do you want this opportunity? As soon as Drake came to the hallway way he told me the recruiter agreed to let me audition again. When I entered the room, the Head of the Acting Program, Amy Herzberg said I was on her list with five yes marks next to my name, however the audition process rushed her to pick students so fast that I never got on her list for callbacks. To make a longer story short, I had finals callbacks for Penn State University, USC, and University of Arkansas and after finals callbacks during my senior year at Wiley College before nationals the only school to offer me a full ride scholarship for my M.F.A. in Acting was the University of Arkansas, and even that, we had to fight for.

Before I dive into my graduate work I would like add one final story about the summer before I began my M.F.A. at the University of Arkansas. In 2016 I was invited to a Graduate Summer Acting Intensive Camp in my home state of California, and was offered a full scholarship that covered housing and food. However, the summer of 2016 is when Philando Castile and Alton Sterling were tragically murdered by police on camera, and I was the only black male out of 40 students at a summer camp. So, not only am I a Black body being
introduced to repetition of Meisner with a group of white people saying I am apathetic, but I am also learning a brand new craft while dealing with violence on my Black body. That summer intensive was brutal as a Black male. I remember one of the instructors accusing me of stealing a blanket (which was loaned to me by one of the black women at the program), while another professor accused me of never letting the animal out (which I did, its name was TRUTH). In this environment, it was extremely difficult to bite my tongue trained with critical Speech and Debate rhetoric. Being as this was a new craft, storytelling through theatre as an actor, I was also trying to prove to my community that I was not a difficult black man to work with. I was told that I could last in the small business of being an Actor if I was easy to work with. Unfortunately, I left this two week long program early. I was having a tough time dealing with the death of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling, but I was told at this intensive to not talk about my personal experience or bring outside world issues to the program, because “the space of theatre is pure” and “we do not have the tools” to discuss issues like police brutality on black bodies or lack of opportunities for black bodies to create a full spectrum of identity in the storytelling realm. This reality that was forced on my foundation in theatrical storytelling was devastating to me. I refused to believe that my body could only exist in the theatrical spaces as a prop with no agency. This introductory experience led me to feel like not only did a multi champion Speech and Debate competitor not have a voice in this space, but also nobody cares about how you feel either. My exit from the program became necessary when a professor from California had all of the students hold hands and repeat the word “nigger” five times, trying to take the power away from the word. I let go of everybody’s hands and walked out the room. Some students asked me if I was going to be all right, while others glared at me for making race such a big deal. The situation of me excusing myself quickly led to me being asked to leave the program, with my
scholarship being used as a guilt trip. The person who invited me was disappointed because they gave me a full ride scholarship and I wasn't being quiet about how I felt during the process.

At the end of that summer I contemplated if theatre was actually for me. I got the sense that this journey of theatrical and cinematic storytelling was going to be difficult, however my Speech and Debate background with my identity as a black male in higher education was rare. At that moment, before I packed all of my belongings and moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas for my M.F.A. in Acting, I had no idea how much every experience leading up to my graduation in May 2019 would shape my storytelling foundation to be one that influences change and, hopefully, inspires millions of others to tell their stories as well.

As I am coming to a close in my Graduate career, I have been able to explore interest in Hip Hop Theatre/Film, One Person Show, and New Play Development. Academically, I have developed a profound interest in adding Afrocentric methodologies to my academic experience, because I believe current Eurocentric methodologies are limiting and those who are underrepresented fail to navigate the system. Essentially, I strive to finding more ways to involve a process that is inclusive of black bodies to better guide academia.
Artist Statement

My name is Austin Dean Ashford. I am a playwriting and acting M.F.A. candidate at the University of Arkansas. My work explores literary and performance arts while integrating argumentation, solo performance, and verse-based storytelling. The focus of my work is on black boys and their quest for understanding rage, empathy, and joy, while enduring daily societal assault, whether physical or verbal, on their black bodies. My work strives to communicate humanity in dark spaces for black boys who never had the chance to heal. Humanity has been stolen from black boys, because blackness has a spectrum that has yet to be fully discovered, and because contemporary society doesn’t see black males as complex or gentle, and often misunderstands their plight. The audiences I am targeting to share these stories include both those who look like me and those who absolutely do not and everyone in between. Ultimately, I want to lessen the distance between human beings utilizing a variety of mediums and stories to create a body of literature and performance that will expand the global canon. My desire is to learn to tell stories so personal that they become universal.

My mission is to honor all the great storytellers before me and expand the use of literary and performance arts while giving black boys an opportunity and space to discover their complexities and gentleness. My mission is to dominate, expand, and innovate storytelling that lessens the distance between human beings, to provide the finest quality of message in storytelling that increases the value of human life, to honor my gifts and talents in ways that serve the community, and to preserve humanity through storytelling.

I want to impress less and inspire more. I desire to expand the black experience on the stage, screen and page. I want to be a great collaborator in work spaces, to take-in feedback and usefully incorporate the feedback that helps my stories speak louder, and build upon a work ethic that leads with enthusiasm and seeks to make the process enjoyable. I want to be known for
doing the work outside of rehearsal that makes art timeless. I am a storyteller who is trained in forensics, spoken word poetry, theatre, and film. I believe storytelling affects community because it gives agency to those without power. Storytelling also gives communities a chance for collective listening. Storytelling can provide questions instead of answers. The Storyteller looks for the dramatic questions. I am interested in storytelling, because I performed for 15 years in Speech and Debate and never saw a play in a theatre. So, coming into the Department of Theatre, while I had years of story-telling experience through my Speech and Debate, I had no experience or training in the theatre. There was a disconnect with the theatre community and the performances I was accustomed to that existed as Interpretation within Speech and Debate. Receiving my training as a theatre artist has expanded my emotional intelligence and long form of storytelling because theatre allows participants to watch a piece live without interruption. This agreement, that for this specific amount of time, we, as spectators, will believe this imaginative narrative interests me as it opens a space for voice and healing. Theatre interests me on a performance studies and social work level as well. I am interested in traveling with my craft as well as creating screen work to make my stories distributable. I want to perform in a spectrum of venues—high-caliber professional venues as well as venues in places that do not have access to quality art. Wherever I go, I want to leave a flag post saying I was successful beyond all odds. My work is about ownership of language, black masculinity, laughing in dark places, and healing from generational trauma. I want to reconstruct the identity of black male bodies, because my community is exposed to black men that are boxed into specific tropes and I want to break the trope on the page, stage, and the screen, while still having the ability to teach globally. I want to be the theatre artist that is involved in advocacy and engagement. I want to create new complex
texts with new structures that allow stories to move in and out of traditional and non-traditional storytelling spaces. Ultimately, I want my stories to have both personal and communal impact.
ARTISTIC JOURNEY

Introduction – Approaching Story Telling with a Dual Emphasis

As much as I struggled to navigate the predominantly white University of Arkansas between 2016-2019, especially after graduating from an Historical Black College and University, I did make a few white allies in the theatre department who helped make my graduate education in-depth and specific. During my time as a graduate student in theatre, I received training in both playwriting and acting. I am extremely grateful for being able to train in both areas simultaneously, because it catalyzed my development as a writer-performer and created a path for the type of storytelling and storyteller I desire to become. I credit my Speech and Debate background that readied me to handle so many events for making this dual-emphasis training practical and, even though I was exhausted and had very little human contact outside of my studies and work, ultimately successful. My training has allowed me to blend a multitude of methodologies, processes, techniques, approaches, and materials that I did not possess prior to attending University of Arkansas. The things I was learning as an actor were informing the things I was learning as a writer and vice-versa, the dual approach resulted in teaching me how to tell a better story. In this portion of my thesis I discuss how the techniques, tools, and paradigms I learned in both areas molded me into the writer-performer and my identity as a Blacktor.

During my M.F.A., Amy Herzberg, Head of Acting, often said: “good theatre lessens the distance between human beings.” Not only do I agree, but I believe this definition is indicative of good storytelling generally and something I wanted my stories to accomplish. Before diving into my process, I want to establish some base-line principles I learned in both areas that helped me understand how my own stories could “lessen the distance between people.”
Observing elements of storytelling from the perspective of the actor begins with character. As an actor, my objective is to use tactics, play action on other characters, and achieve my goal. A character will use tactics and play action on other characters because a character wants to get something from every character they encounter in order to help them achieve their objective or goal in a story. To understand a character, I must understand the character’s objective. What is it that the character wants to accomplish? Then, I must observe the character’s obstacles. What is in the way of the character accomplishing their desire? What are the character’s values? What experiences have shaped their principles in life? Last, what is the fueling thought or the motivational mantra or phrases that helps the character achieve their goal even when the obstacle seems to stop them at times? Essentially, what is the motivating force that triumphs over the obstacle to achieve the objective for the character? Of course, from the acting perspective, this all applies to an existing script, but when I began writing my own work, with my own characters, these ideas and principles informed my writing and my approach to character.

Observing elements of storytelling from the perspective of a playwright, I began to focus on environment and relationships between the characters. I must know and understand the environment in which the story is being told, I must uncover the entirety of the relationships between all the characters involved AND see how they transform during the journey. What is the protagonist force and the antagonist force? What moment in the story does one of the forces win, and how does everybody in the story respond to that action? I began to understand—as the playwright—I have the responsibility of balancing all of the forces in the play, if not balanced or nuanced, the play comes off as two-dimensional and that is certainly not going to lessen the distance between people.
Solo-Plays Created

During my Graduate Studies, I wrote a trilogy of solo plays in which I was both the performer and playwright. These include, in order of creation, (I)sland T(rap), Black Book, and Blackting. All of these were written and developed in either a playwriting workshop or a performance class for actors focused on creating a One Person Show. All three were performed in some capacity at the University, with Black Book being my official thesis production on the University Mainstage in November 2018. The process of writing, performing in, and ultimately touring these shows drew from both what I learned in playwriting and my performance classes. In order to better understand the process of creating this trilogy, I have provided a brief synopsis of each play below.

**Play: (I)sland T(rap): The Epic Remixology of the Odyssey**

A lyrical, mythical, musical solo-soul journey, (I)sland T(rap) is a retelling of Homer's Odyssey based on the black experience in America from the perspective of a young black artist who must navigate the turbulent waters of contemporary American culture while trying to find his authentic voice. Part Odyssey, part Jungle Book, part autobiographical experience, (I)sland T(rap) is a hip-hop riff that follows the allegorical hero Black Ulysses (Austin) on a quest of self-discovery and serenity. (I)sland T(rap) combines lyrical poetry, live music, and commentary on the Black experience to chart a soul journey on an exotic island where Black Ulysses discovers his “home” in a society full of gun-violence and oppression. Recognized by the Kennedy Center for Original Hip-Hop Script (2018), this narratives dives into overcoming isolation through fantasy, myth, and escape.

**Play: Black Book**

Welcome to Melvin Tolson High School—it's summer school, it's hot, the barbwire fence is fixed, and a young African American boy has been shot by a teacher, leaving his group of
friends reeling from the loss and wondering if their voices can ever be heard. Enter Austin Dean Ashford, a former Great Debater, to teach a master class on public speaking and challenge this group of boys to speak out and give voice to their hopes and fears. Filled with pressing issues, inspiring characters, and graced with comic flourishes, this one-person dramedy debates what happens to young minds when our educational spaces begin to resemble a prison more than school and a place to learn and grow. Winner of the 2019 Rosa Parks Award from the Kennedy Center, Black Book explores violence in public education at the intersection of Speech and Debate

**Play: Blackting for the Magical Negro**

This play, while still in the development process, asks: how do black bodies maneuver through predominately white spaces? How do the techniques of an actor overlap with the survival techniques a black body needs to employ to accomplish the simple objective of moving safely in an environment not made for them? Set on a blank stage with a stool in one of the most liberal-progressive southern towns in America. Blackting is a survival guide for a black M.F.A. student in theatre—a captivating black critique by a mixed media griot. This multilayered triptych solo play uses magic, subversive comedy, and heartbreaking pain to show how difficult and dangerous it is to navigate your way through a predominately white space when you are a black man. How in order to survive, you are always Blackting on some level, so why not embrace your technical training as an actor, and your identity as the Blacktor.
Becoming the Blacktor

BL·acK·ting
ˈbl,ackˌting/ Verb
noun: blacktor, blacktress
“a person whose cannot separate the act of being black and acting at the same time while maneuvering through predominately white spaces”

I am the artist I am today, thanks to a string of classes in both areas that built on each other. When I first arrived to the University of Arkansas I had never been in a play, but here I was immersed in a small community that was filled with constant theatre at all ages and all levels: from children’s theatre to professional theatre. This robust environment gave me a perspective of how varied the theatrical landscape was, which would feed my interest in one-person shows and hip-hop theatre. My very first semester of graduate school, I took the playwriting workshop “Adventures in One Act Structures” with John Walch, Head of Playwriting. Coming into the class, I had a lot of experience as a writer, not only through my Speech and Debate training, but also with Spoken Word poetry, songs, and raps. This class introduced me to longer narrative forms, and rearranged my process as a writer. The course transformed the way I look, feel, and approach a beat, a scene, a sequence, and an act.

One of the biggest things I took away from this class was about how a play lives in three-dimensions. This is different than a poem that is on a page. Plays take place in an environment, which is a strong force in a play and John encouraged me to “activate a location” to help further deepen and inform a scene. John Walch, aka the Guru, encouraged me focus on the environment of the story and how I, as a story creator, should allow the location and environment to come alive and be active at all times. The environment should be a force that drives character action and behavior. The environment can be a positive or negative force (or a mixture of both
throughout), but it should not be neutral. Activating the location also helps deepen the story, because it gives the audience imagery and potential metaphor to dive into.

As a black male body the idea that environment is always active and acting on you made sense to me. How I move and navigate through space—especially predominately white spaces—is always filled with conflict and invisible forces. As a story-teller, I want that awareness to live on stage, I want my personal thoughts and my stories to activate the environment so that the audience or reader is aware of how the atmosphere affects the story specifically, and the larger story of how black bodies move through space. I find this concept crucial to my work and central to the idea of being a Blacktor.

In all three of my plays the beat-by-beat sequence and environment are pivotal to the story telling. In (I)sland T(rap), the environment is at times toxic and helpful to the protagonist’s quest towards serenity. In Black Book, the school the boys attend is surrounded by barbed-wire, the air-conditioning is broken, the bathrooms are disgusting all which have become systematic obstacles for the development and education of these young black men. In Blackting, the environment is various “stages” a black man performs on, whether that be a literal stage for a black magician or comic, or a more precarious “stage” on which the protagonist needs to perform on during a late-night encounter with a police officer. If, as Shakespeare noted, “all the world’s a stage” (As You Like It; II; VII), to survive and thrive the Blacktor must learn to perform on all of them.

In this class and other graduate workshops, I also learned story structure and the many approaches of how sequences and acts have clues or “pointers” hidden in plain sight, the significance of which will be revealed later. In (I)sland T(rap), for instances, the imagery of a snake—and the protagonists fear of them is pointed at throughout, and the play climaxes with the
encounter between Ulysses and a python (the Cyclops), who tries to suffocate the young black
man’s voice, to silence him forever. In Black Book, the barbed wire is pointed to again and
again, and in the end, as an act of protest and physical Speech and Debate, one of the students
cuts it up in an attempt to break out of the school to prison pipeline. These scenes are more
effective because these story elements have already been seen before the act, the audience just
didn’t yet know about the importance of what they saw. This helps trigger the perception shift in
the audience.

My interest in structure allows a story to have a major reveal and pay off at the end. Having a structure to support the type of story and message the playwright is trying to articulate was another major element for me. In addition, how to use dialogue that moves a story in active voice with verse-based language was introduced to me in my first semester. During my course with John Walch, I also learned about Joseph Campbell’s legacy and specifically his concept of the hero with a thousand faces. I was unaware of Campbell’s concept that all of the stories we love fit into four main structures (The Milieu story, The Idea story, The Character story, and The Event story) and are directly connected to Joseph Campbell’s idea of “A hero with a thousand faces” who needs to go from an ordinary world to an extraordinary world. I liked this multi-dimensional way of thinking about character and dramatic action, and sought to put that into the work I was creating. For example, in (I)sland T(rap) the protagonist goes from his ordinary world where gun violence plagues him and crosses into the extraordinary, fantastical world of Zawmgowa where he seeks serenity. In Blackting, the main character crosses from his ordinary world—a Historical Black College and University—into a Predominately White Institution, in which he needs to learn to present different “faces” depending on the context in which he is performing.
It was in John Walch’s writing courses that I learned that if structured properly, you could add poems and songs to your theatrical storytelling. As mentioned, I came in with extensive experience as a Spoken Word poet. Having little experience with theatre, I didn’t know plays could include my poems, raps, songs, and beat box skills. This opened a whole horizon that at once felt new, but also felt familiar as this was essentially what my training in Speech and Debate—especially in POI which mixes different forms of literature to advance an argument. A play could be made in the similar way—a form of intertextuality that blends poems, songs, and raps that support the journey of central narrative character arc. This discovery led me to change the piece I was working on that semester, but more significantly led me to begin developing pieces in a way that reconnected with the intertextual form that so fascinated me with the novel Moby Dick when I was an undergraduate. I sincerely started this exploration of a verse-based theatrical form in a graduate playwriting class focusing on Adaptation the following semester with my one-person show, (I)sland T(rap).

I was enrolled in John Walch’s course in Adaptation, which he co-taught with Head of Directing Michael Landman, as a playwright and actor because acting for the class was a part of my Graduate Assistantship. In this class I learned that there are levels to stealing from a piece of work and creating your own. In Adaptation, I learned what appropriation, loose adaptation, and tight adaptation were. I learned that Shakespeare stole a majority of his most famous play ideas, which was perfect, because Shakespeare used verse-based storytelling like the raps and rhymes of a hip hop aesthetic, and hip hop is, essentially, adaptation as it uses samples and remixes older styles of music and recreates them. The course resulted in my one-person show, (I)sland T(rap), which is an adaptation of Homer’s Ulysses, but from a young black man’s perspective. The work
is a solo play, where I perform a number of characters I encounter on my journey toward trying to find serenity as a black body navigating through a contemporary American landscape. The piece mixes raps, songs, and poems, as it follows the larger narrative of Austin—Black Ulysses—trying to make his way through the obstacles and pitfalls that a black body encounters on a daily basis. As I was developing (I)sland T(rap) around the notion that I was remixing Homer’s Epic poem The Odyssey, this felt like a synthesis of all my education and training—where as an English major for undergraduate studies I was exposed to historical texts, my sampling and hip hop aesthetics, my experience as a spoken word poet, my training Speech and Debate (especially Program Oral Interpretation), and my emerging training as an performer and a playwright. (I)sland T(rap) felt like my authentic self on stage.

This evolving integrated self corresponded to what I was learning in my acting training as well, especially in my class with Amy Herzberg on the Sanford Meisner technique. Meisner taught me how to emotionally prepare for a scene, so the actor can be authentically living on the inside of you and to instinctually live out of release, instead of holding back. Performing a solo piece takes a tremendous amount of preparation, and Meisner helped me prepare. I’ve also found through the multiple places I have now performed this play (the Kennedy Center, United Solo Festival off-Broadway, and coming up at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival), the connection with the audience is key to the play working, and when I am my authentically inside of myself is when I make the strongest connection with the audience.

This connects to a concept of receiving and radiating that I learned in my acting class with Kate Frank exploring the Michael Chekhov technique. In the course, we would play with a ball and just focus on really receiving the energy that comes with the ball being tossed towards us as well as our follow through when we would radiate our energy to the world. As a solo
performer, who only has the audience as his scene partner, this concept of receiving their energy, and then radiating mine out has been incredibly useful. My outside-in method to getting inside of a character or multiple characters has informed my technique to detail each and every beat in a scene that I must create or develop.

After writing (I)sland T(rap), I felt like I was understanding of the type of stories I wanted to tell and how I wanted to tell them. I refined this process in developing my next solo play, Black Book. I now had a bit of vocabulary, better understanding of story telling structure, and how to rewrite and polish a story. In Black Book I was able to more closely focus on the format of one-person show by using outside–in techniques to develop characters and thinking about using partner work I learned during Meisner. In Black Book I found the shape of the student characters first physically using “archetypal gestures” that I learned in the Chekhov class. What gestures they used gave me ideas about who they were and how they would interact on the stage and the page. The idea of the repeated gesture was something I learned in my Viewpoints class with Michael Landman; and in John’s class he often said purposeful repetition is a powerful tool in the writer’s toolbox. The use of these repeated gestures really informed how I was going to tell this story and keep each boy specific and detailed.

As a performer, I was able to pull from my Meisner training by using my audience as my scene partner for the entire play and sourcing my energy from them. As the writer I “cast” the entire audience as the students in the room with me, intentionally breaking the fourth wall and interacting with them. My goal is that they all could imagine what is what like to be one of the traumatized young boys locked in school that has no interest in their development. This agreement makes the play an experience that can change on any given night, depending on the
audience’s energy, but for me it still lives truthfully no matter the circumstances and still strives to lessen the distance between people.

Developing Black Book in Michael Landman's Creating a One Person Show class as well as developing my own class on Hip Hop Theatre pointed me towards a career path I will continue to focus on. The One Person Show class also gave me practical tools—how to make a bio and a mission statement for what I want from my work. I see solo performance as a vehicle for me in trying to make a name for myself in theatre and finding work to sustain me as an artist. One-person show taught me how to make my storytelling into a business, starting from having nothing but an idea and ending with having an entire production that I can tour and make an income from. I learned that the forms of one-person show are endless. I learned how to create a piece that fits a time limit and how to adjust that for various occasions. Most importantly, I learned how to receive criticism from an audience and how to effectively incorporate that feedback to strengthen the story I am trying to tell. Black Book, for example, had three workshop productions. The first was in the One-Person Show class, where I shared it with an audience of peers. The second was at the Arkansas New Play Festival, where I shared it with a more general audience. The third was the thesis production at the University, where I shared it with University audiences as well as a group of high school students brought in to see the show. I videotaped each performance, and in my rewriting process I review the tape, looking for where audiences are engaged and where they are not as engaged as I want them, and use that a guide to making adjustments to the script. The cool thing about having two one-person shows done was I was then able to test how they worked with audiences outside of the University and this specific area. I applied to and was accepted into several Festivals and got the chance to further develop the pieces in front of audiences across the country and globe.
Now going in to my third solo play, “Blackting” I have a vocabulary and rookie experience of taking a solo play with hip-hop theatre elements on the road. But I had to do my research about what others have done in solo performance like Audra McDonald, John Leguizamo, Dael Orlandersmith, Anna Deavere Smith, Daniel Betty, and Nijala Sun. In One Person Show, I learned what my style and substance was—this form of intertextuality discussed earlier that focuses on issues of race, identity, and my experience of being a black body in contemporary America. I recognize, much like Moby Dick, my story was an epic journey that had different pieces of literature and text in conversations with each other with a very specific black male lens. This building of process led me to explore a larger question about the Magical Negro. The original definition of the Magical Negro is a black person who is created to be the savior of white people and is so exceptional they are often separated from their blackness. Similar to Nate Parker who made the film Birth of a Nation to reclaim the name from the first film made in America that was about blackface and lynchings, I aim to reclaim the name of the Magical Negro and prove blacks are not magical. Blackting would not be possible if I did not make (I)sland T(rap) and Black Book because this was the first time I attempted to use a solo voice but in a triptych form while trying to duck/rabbit (explained later) my perspective at the same time.

One challenge I faced developing these works was a lack of people of color to bounce ideas off of. It was difficult because the culture I am trying to speak for and to is absent from the theatrical space where I am receiving my education. As a result, I had to figure out how to speak to audience who had little context for understanding my perspective and cultural background. Fortunately, I discovered in the process of developing these plays that there are plenty of aspects beyond culture that connects an audience to a new play—these include the values of the
protagonist and the obstacles they must overcome. I learned that having a voice and representation in theatre spaces matter. I learned that the literary canon does not include a large enough spectrum for people of color to be dynamic and complex, making the creation and development of new work so critically important. And the process of creating new work also gives the community a role in telling and shaping the story. I’m interested in new structures, and rearranging structures in new ways, for telling stories and found the new play development process a critical part of my training during my journey towards my M.F.A.

One final concept I learned about in my graduate playwriting courses was what John Walch called “the Duck/Rabbit” effect that powerful plays have on an audience. The “Duck/Rabbit” is a visual image in which the viewer perceives duality and has to see the complexity in any story. I am including the image below:

![Duck/Rabbit Image](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/4b/Duck_or_rabbit.jpg/800px-Duck_or_rabbit.jpg)

*Source: Wiki Media Commons*

For the purposes of playwriting, the idea with the duck/rabbit is that powerful stories are made of contrasting truths and the play makes the audience hold both in their minds and wrestle with the complexity and question their perception of right and wrong, true and false, correct or incorrect. The play lets them see deeper into a subject/character and makes them hold conflicting perceptions of truth in their minds.

I respond to the vocabulary of the “Duck/Rabbit” because as a black man it reflects what I feel I’ve always had to live. How I am perceived is always a duality and deepened my own
understanding of the term coined by W.E.B. Du Bois, W.E.B Du Bois: “double-consciousness.” I understand double-consciousness as the black man needing to have two brains: one where he is compelled or mandated to understand the white experience and a second where he must live the understanding of the black experience.

The metaphor of the “Duck/Rabbit” is also reflected in my work. My plays are both raps and narrative-based explorations. They are intertextual at their heart and embrace and explore the duality of the black experience. And finally, the metaphor of the “Duck/Rabbit” released me from avoiding or tabling these issues, because it allowed me to observe and feel an essential part of the complexities of the culture I navigate through—including my work as a performer. I can’t separate my blackness from my acting or writing, I’m a Blacktor. Early in my time in school, when someone asked me to separate my blackness from a role, I felt they were asking me to do a magic trick, but now my own perception has shifted, because I now see that as impossible. Instead of focusing on the either/or mentality, I now understand the duality of my role as an artist—and seeing this and living this “Duck/Rabbit” truth and putting that truth into the stories and performances I have, and will continue to create, in my artistic journey to lessen the distance between people is the real magic trick.
APPENDIX
Austin Dean Ashford

Biography

Austin Dean Ashford is an storyteller, motivator, and educator originally from the San Francisco Bay Area of California. During his time at James Logan High School, Mr. Ashford fine-tuned his gift for speech, poetry, acting and debate under the direction of Dr. Tommie Lindsey, Jr., a MacArthur Genius award recipient. Austin’s gift for poetry was featured on HBO’s Def Poetry Jam, “Brave New Voices” and was the World Individual Youth Slam Champion.

Austin’s performance background began early on as an oral interpretation student in competitive forensics and spoken word poetry. Austin earned a full scholarship to compete for Wiley College in Speech and Debate, a team re-started in 2008 by Denzel Washington following the success of The Great Debaters, a movie he starred in and directed. During his undergraduate career Austin won 21 national titles, the majority of which were in oral interpretation and acting events. In addition to Speech and Debate competitions, his undergraduate years were marked by active participation in spoken word, success in which allowed him to travel across the country as an invited guest of various colleges, universities, libraries, and student organizations.

After graduating from Wiley College in 2016, Austin enrolled in the MFA program at the University of Arkansas, a three-year program during which time he specialized in acting and playwriting. Austin participated in the Prison Story Project, a twelve-week workshop at the Pine Bluff Correctional Facilities in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Along with a cohort of 7 theatre artist, they led writing workshops exclusively with inmates on death row, writings later fashioned into a production delivered to the inmates. As his studies progressed, he began focusing on solo show productions, specifically those integrating aspects of hip hop theatre and spoken word. Austin’s first solo show was “(I)sland T(rap),” a solo show he wrote in 2017, and has been performing at various locations since. Austin was fortunate with the show, competing successfully in the American College Theatre Festival (ACTF), a series of theatre festivals sponsored by the Kennedy Center, and advancing to the national festival in Washington D.C., at which Austin won several awards. Since then, Austin was able to take “(I)sland T(rap)” on a summer high school tour, to perform in New York City, Southern California, and other notable venues. Finally, his most recent project, “Black Book” is also a solo show in which Austin describes the obstacles for underrepresented youth in educational spaces and how an activity like Speech and Debate can help youth navigate with resilience and excellence regardless of how the world may view them. Austin was fortunate for “Black Book” to win several more awards from the Kennedy Center’s (ACTF) and will be performing the piece in New York City this fall.

Austin brings ten years of academic acumen shaped by the activity of Speech and Debate, a co-curricular activity that intersects performance, theory, and social activism. As a 21-time national champion, forensics shaped Austin’s rhetoric as a voice for black bodies dealing with oppression and trauma, and provided him the tools to navigate spaces historically not catered to black bodies. Austin’s competitive success has allowed him to give back to his community.

As a practitioner of the arts, Austin has written and developed three one-person shows in addition to scripts for two seasons of television. As a thinker of the arts, Austin created a Hip
Hop Theatre/Film curriculum which Austin taught during his final year at the University of Arkansas. Outside of the classroom, Austin shared his knowledge further in the form of a performance workshop that toured at high schools and rehabilitation centers all over Arkansas. In 2013, Austin created a program called Lyrical Therapy University, or LTU. LTU utilizes a workshop format to help participants understand English through art-based engagement; focusing on literacy with spoken word poetry, public speaking and hip hop theatre. LTU allows participants in the program to gain confidence in their writing and speaking capabilities while acknowledging the acts of critical thinking and discourse as artistic acts as well. Having received his undergraduate degree from Wiley College, a Historically Black College University with no prior experience in theatre, transitioning into a Predominately White institution with no professors of color in the Theater department, Austin had to learn how to navigate his new field with little direct guidance. This experience, however, made him a stronger communicator and performer, and leaves him excited at the potential to move forward in his work.
Sample Cover Letter
Austin Dean Ashford

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept the following materials – a cover letter, curriculum vitae, and creative samples, – submitted as part of my application. As you can see in the application materials, I am currently an MFA student at the University of Arkansas set to graduate in May 2019.

My performance background began early on as an oral interpretation student in competitive forensics and spoken word poetry. I earned a full scholarship to compete for Wiley College in Speech and Debate, a team re-started in 2008 by Denzel Washington following the success of The Great Debaters, a movie he starred in and directed. During my undergraduate career I won 21 national titles, the majority of which were in oral interpretation and acting events. In addition to Speech and Debate competitions, my undergraduate years were marked by active participation in spoken word, success in which allowed me to travel across the country as an invited guest of various colleges, universities, libraries, and student organizations. This interaction with literature and storytelling have been a foundation for my lyrical development as an artist.

After graduating from Wiley College in 2016, I enrolled in the MFA program at the University of Arkansas, a three-year program during which time I worked closely with John Walch and Amy Herzberg and specialized in acting and playwriting. Many of the performances, symposiums, and awards listed on my curriculum vitae stem from my MFA work, specifically three major productions I would like to briefly describe. First, in the fall of 2016, I participated in the Prison Story Project, a twelve-week workshop at the Pine Bluff Correctional Facilities in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Along with a cohort of 7 theatre artist, we led writing workshops exclusively with inmates on death row, writings later fashioned into a production delivered to the inmates in the fall of 2016 all with an ukulele and a purpose. As my studies progressed, I began focusing on solo show productions, specifically those integrating aspects of hip hop theatre and spoken word. My first play was “(I)sland T(rap),” a solo show I wrote in 2017, and have been performing at various locations since. I was fortunate with the show, competing successfully in the American College Theatre Festival (ACTF), a series of theatre festivals sponsored by the Kennedy Center, and advancing to the national festival in Washington D.C., at which I won several awards. Since then, I was able to take “(I)sland T(rap)” on a summer high school tour, to perform in New York City, Southern California, and other notable venues. Finally, my most recent project, “Black Book” is also a solo show in which I describe the obstacles for underrepresented youth in educational spaces and how an activity like Speech and Debate can help youth navigate with resilience and excellence regardless of how the world may view them. The major framework of my art is through verse-based storytelling which is why I am very interested in participating and studying where I would be eager to work with your distinguished organization, and hopefully, grow into the champion of storytelling with messages that move hearts towards unity and love. I have been dreaming to develop my storytelling since I was a small boy and I believe the time is now. Thank you for the opportunity to apply and, if you have any questions, I would be happy to talk with you and the selection committee at your convenience.
Sincerely,

Austin Dean Ashford

Email: Austindeanashford@gmail.com
Mobile: 510-290-9932
Austin Dean Ashford
RESUME

Freshly returning as the OUTSTANDING PERFORMER from the 2019 New Zealand Fringe Festival, and the OUTSTANDING PERFORMER for the 2019 Dunedin Fringe Festival, and his new One Person Show "Black Book" receiving 7 awards from the Kennedy Center's ACTF 2019. Being the Keynote Speaker for the 2019 KCACTF Region 3 Festival and being the Host and Speaker for the 2018 “Tedx Fayetteville”. Plus, recent recognition from Off-Broadway at Theatre Row after receiving the "2018 United Solo festival Best One Man Show" award with his solo play "(I)sland T(rap)." In addition to multiple national recognitions at the 2018 Kennedy Center ACTF, Austin Dean Ashford, recently appeared as all roles in the feature of his One person show at The Kennedy Center (Terrace Theatre & Theatre Lab). Austin also appeared as Bobby Hamilton in the Champion at TheatreSquared, as well as Bob Moses in All The Way (TheatreSquared), his One person show, (I)sland T(rap) was a recently awarded the Mimi and Harold Steinberg for Best National Student Play, The Hip Hop Theatre Creator Award, Distinguished Achievement for the Lorraine Hansberry Award, Distinguished Performance by an Actor in Play, Distinguished Performance of a New Work, and the Kennedy Center Citizens Award, As well as a presenter at the 2018 Kennedy Center Arts Summit and many other awards by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Nationally and Regionally. (I)sland T(rap) toured statewide with TheatreSquared’s inaugural spring educational tour for Arkansas High Schools after being the Hip Hop coach for their production of ”Vietgone.” (I)sland T(rap) won Outstanding Solo Performance, Best of Festival, and the New Zealand Cultural exchange Award at the 2018 San Diego International Fringe Festival, and featured Off-Broadway at the 2018 United Solos Festival in New York and won the festival honors of 2018 “Best One Man Show”. Austin featured his 2nd Solo play, “Black Book” as an invited production at the 2019 KCACTF Region 6 Festival. Where the play was award the Richard A Weaver Best Play Award. Austin was awarded The Rosa Parks Playwriting Award, The Kennedy Center Citizens Award, Outstanding Production of a new Work, and Outstanding Performance by an Actor for KCACTF Nationals 2019. Austin was a member of the Nate Parker Film Institute year 3 class where he was the 2018 Pitch it winner, Lead Screenwriter, Actor, and Composer of the original soundtrack for the film “Black Bones” which was featured in the 2019 Pan African Film Festival in Los Angeles. Austin was also the recipient of the 2018 Fayetteville Film Festival “Pitch it award” for the idea of (I)sland T(rap) the film which will debut fall of 2019 at the Fayetteville Film Festival. Austin is a OneBeat Colombia Fellow and will develop music for social change in Bogota, Colombia after graduation in May. Austin was featured on HBO’s Def Poetry Jam BRAVE NEW VOICES and was crowned the Individual Youth World Poetry Slam Champion. During his undergraduate training at Wiley College, Austin earned 21 National Championship Awards in competitive Collegiate Speech and Debate. While receiving his B.A. in English, Austin still holds the 3 year running title of “Most Valuable Performer” from the Denzel Washington/Melvin B Tolson Forensics society. Austin developed an inaugural course, “Hip Hop Theatre/Film” at the University of Arkansas while currently being a 3rd year MFA candidate for Playwriting and
Acting at University of Arkansas. Future plans are to pursue PhD in Interdisciplinary Fine Arts at Texas Tech University and create work that lessens the distance between human beings on the stage, page, and the screen.
Austin Dean Ashford CV  
MFA Graduate Student  
University of Arkansas  

Last Updated January 13, 2019

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Fayetteville, AR  72703  
Mobile: 510-290-9932  
Email: Austindeanashford@gmail.com

EDUCATION

Masters of Fine Arts  
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, May 2019  
Dual Emphasis in Playwriting and Acting  
J. William Fulbright College of Arts & Science  
Departments of Fine Arts & Theatre  
Advisors: Amy Herzberg, John Walch

Bachelors of Arts  
Wiley College, Marshall, TX, May 2016  
School of Humanities & Social Sciences  
Major in English

Certificate of Completion  
Nate Parker Foundation Summer Film Institute,  
Marshall, TX, July 2018

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Attendee, One Person Show Workshop led by Dael Orlandersmith, Theatre Department, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, Spring, 2017.

Attendee, Hip Hop Theatre Workshop, led by Idris Goodwin, Theatre Department, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Spring, 2017.

Attendee, Playwriting Workshop, led by Amy Evans, Fayetteville Public Library, Fayetteville, AR, November 2017.

Attendee, Playwriting Workshop, led by Mark Shannan, May, Fayetteville Public Library, Fayetteville, AR, Fall 2017

Attendee, Writing Workshop, led by Mona Mansour, Fayetteville Public Library, Fayetteville, AR, Fall 2017

Attendee, Playwriting Workshop, led by Stephen Karam, Fayetteville Public Library, Fayetteville, AR, January 2018
Attendee, Playwriting Workshop, led by Jacqueline Goldfinger, American College Theatre Festival, Region Three, San Angelo State University, San Angelo, TX, March, 2018

Attendee, Acting Audition Workshop, led by Mitch Tebo, Department of Theatre, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, Spring, 2018

Attendee, Playwriting Workshop, led by Mark Bly, Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C., April, 2018

Attendee, Sankofa Workshop, led by Brian Favors, the Nate Parker Summer Film Institute, Los Angeles, CA, Summer 2018

Attendee, Emotional Intelligence and Communication Workshop, led by Dr. Emily Richardson, the Nate Parker Summer Film Institute, Los Angeles, CA, Summer 2018

Attendee, Directing Workshop, led by Assia, the Nate Parker Summer Film Institute, Los Angeles, CA, Summer 2018

Attendee, Screenwriting Workshop, led by Jackie Stone, the Nate Parker Summer Film Institute, Los Angeles, CA, Summer 2018

Attendee, Film Auditioning Workshop, led by Twinkie, the Nate Parker Summer Film Institute, Los Angeles, CA, Summer 2018

Attendee, Producing Workshop led by James Constantine, the Nate Parker Summer Film Institute, Los Angeles, CA, Summer 2018

Attendee, Producing Workshop led by Sylvia Milo, the Faulkner Performing Art Center, Fayetteville, AR, Spring 2019

**CONFERENCE, FESTIVAL, AND SUMMIT PRESENTATIONS**

Presenter, *Communicate through Debate Poetry Workshop*, Ethical Leadership Conference, Wiley College, Marshall, TX, 2016

Speaker, “Black Coaches Matter: A Programmed Oral Interpretation,” *National Individual Events Tournament of Champions* (performed as part of the ceremony honoring Dr. Tommie Lindsey, a lifetime achievement honoree), Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN, 2016


Performer, “(I)sland T(Rap) – A Solo Play,” *Arkansas New Play Festival*, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, 2017
Performer, “(I)sland T(Rap) – A Solo Play,” *American College Theatre Festival Districts*, Fayetteville, AR, 2017

Invited Speaker and Performer, *the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Speech & Debate Tournament*, Wiley College, Marshall, TX, 2018

Performer, “(I)sland T(Rap) – A Solo Play,” *American College Theatre Foundation, Region Six*, San Angelo, TX, 2018

Performer, “(I)sland T(Rap) – A Solo Play,” written and performed by Austin Dean Ashford, *The American College Theatre National Festival*, The Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C., 2018

Performer, “(I)sland T(Rap) – A Solo Play,” *Kennedy Center Arts Summit*, Washington, D.C., 2018

Performer, “Black Book – A Solo Play,” written and performed by Austin Dean Ashford, *Arkansas New Play Festival*, Fayetteville, AR, 2018

Performer, “(I)sland T(Rap) – A Solo Play,” written and performed by Austin Dean Ashford, Performance and Performance Workshops performed as part of *ARKANSAS t2 Educational Tour – Northwest to Southeast*, Arkansas, 2018

Performer, “(I)sland T(Rap) – A Solo Play,” *San Diego Fringe Festival*, San Diego, CA, 2018, **awarded Outstanding Solo Performance, Best in Festival, and Cultural Exchange Awards**

Performer, “(I)sland T(Rap) – A Solo Play,” *United Solo Festival*, New York, NY, 2018 **awarded Best One Man Show of 2018 at Theatre Row, Off-Broadway**

Speaker, “Stories We Live, Stories We Love,” *TedX Fayetteville*, Fayetteville, AR, 2018

Performer, “Black Book – A Solo Show,” written and performed by Austin Dean Ashford, *American College Theatre Festival*, District Competition, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, 2018

Pitch Winner, Lead Screenwriter, Composer, & Actor, “Black Bones,” Nate Parker Film Institute, Marshall, TX, summer, 2018

Performer, “Blackting – A Solo Show,” written and performed by Austin Dean Ashford, *UARK SOLOS*, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, 2018

Performer, “(I)sland T(Rap) – A Solo Play,” *The American College Theatre Festival, Region 3 Regional Contest*, Sponsored by the Kennedy Center, workshops on Hip Hop Theatre & Film, Madison, WI, January, 2019

Performer, “(I)sland T(Rap) – A Solo Play,” written and performed by Austin Dean Ashford, *Artinfusion*, Sponsored by the Walton Arts Foundation, Crystal Bridges National Museum, Bentonville, AR, Feb, 2019
Speaker, “Black Bones – Film Premiere,” *Nate Parker Film Institute, Region 3 Regional Contest*, Sponsored by the Pan African Film Festival, Los Angeles, CA, Feb, 2019

Performer, “(I)sland T(Rap) – A Solo Play,” *New Zealand Fringe Festival*, Sponsored by the San Diego International Fringe Festival, workshops on Hip Hop Theatre & Film, Wellington, NZ, Mar, 2019

Performer, “(I)sland T(Rap) – A Solo Play,” *Dunedin Fringe Festival*, Sponsored by the San Diego International Fringe Festival, workshops on Hip Hop Theatre & Film, Dunedin, NZ, Mar, 2019


**AWARDS FOR THEATRE, PLAYWRITING, & ACTING**

**National Runner-Up, The Harold and Mimi Steinberg National Student Playwriting Award.** Awarded by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for “(I)sland T(rap) – A Solo Show,” Washington, D. C., April, 2018.

**National Runner-Up, The Hip Hop Theatre Creator Award.** Awarded by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for “(I)sland T(rap) – A Solo Show,” Washington, D. C., April, 2018.

**Distinguished Achievement, The Lorraine Hansberry Playwriting Award,** Awarded by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for “(I)sland T(rap) – A Solo Show,” 2018.

**Recipient, The Kennedy Center Citizens Artist Award,** Awarded by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for “(I)sland T(rap) – A Solo Show,” Washington, D. C., April, 2018.


**Recipient, Distinguished Production of A New Work,** Awarded by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for “(I)sland T(rap) – A Solo Show,” Washington, D. C., April, 2018.

**Recipient, Distinguished Performance by an Actor in a Play,** Awarded by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for “(I)sland T(rap) – A Solo Show,” Washington, D. C., April, 2018.

**Recipient, The Invited Production Award,** Awarded by the American College Theatre Festival, Awarded by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for “(I)sland T(rap) – A Solo Show,” Washington, D. C., March, 2018.
Recipient, Region 6 Support of New Works, Awarded by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for “(I)sland T(rap) – A Solo Show,” Washington, D. C., March, 2018.

Finalist, Region 6 Irene Ryans Award. Awarded by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for “(I)sland T(rap) – A Solo Show,” Washington, D. C., March, 2018.

Recipient, OUTSTANDING SOLO PERFORMANCE, Awarded by San Diego International Fringe Festival for “(I)sland T(rap),” San Diego, CA, Jul, 2018.

Recipient, New Zealand Cultural Exchange Award, Awarded by San Diego International Fringe Festival for “(I)sland T(rap),” San Diego, CA, Jul, 2018.

Recipient, BEST in FEST, Awarded by San Diego International Fringe Festival for “(I)sland T(rap),” San Diego, CA, Jul, 2018.

Recipient, Best One Man Show, Awarded by United Solo Festival for “(I)sland T(rap),” New York City, NY, Nov, 2018.


Recipient, OUTSTANDING PERFORMER, Awarded by New Zealand Fringe Festival for “(I)sland T(rap),” Wellington, New Zealand, Mar, 2019.

Recipient, OUTSTANDING PERFORMER, Awarded by Dunedin Fringe Festival for “(I)sland T(rap),” Dunedin, New Zealand, Mar, 2019.

Recipient, Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Play, Awarded by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for “Black Book – A Solo Show,” Washington, D. C., April, 2019.


AWARDS FOR INTERCOLLEGIATE FORENSICS (SPEECH & DEBATE)

Competitor, *The James Logan High School Forensics Team* (Union City, CA, 2005-2008), coached by Dr. Tommie Lindsey, 2003 recipient of Oprah Winfrey’s Angel Award and a 2004 recipient of the MacArthur Genius Grant recipient for work with James Logan Forensics Team. Competitive highlights include winning the California High School Speech & Debate Association State Champions, 2005; National Speech & Debate Association School of Excellence Award recipients, 2005-2008


National Champion, Dramatic Interpretation, Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament, 2014.

National Champion, Poetry Interpretation, Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament, 2014.

Top Speaker, Public Forum Debate, Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament, 2014.

National Champion, Dramatic Interpretation, Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament, 2015.

National Champion, Program Oral Interpretation, Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament, 2016.


AWARDS FOR SLAM POETRY

Participant, Brave New Voices National Youth Poetry Slam, (San Jose, CA; Washington D. C.; Chicago, IL), 2006-2009.


Champion, University of Kentucky Apollo Slam, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, 2010.


INVITED LECTURES, PERFORMANCES, AND WORKSHOPS

Performer, Youth Speaks Symposium, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, 2007

Headliner, Spoken Word Performance, Sponsored by the Gonzaga University Library, Gonzaga University, Spokane Washington, November 2008
Host and Performer, Fresh Mic, Kentucky State University, Frankfort, Kentucky 2009

Host and Performer, Phresh Mic, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Kentucky, Spring 2009

Host and Performer, Fresh Mic, Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky, Spring 2009

Headliner Poetry Showcase, Greenhouse Poetry, Inc. Poetry Slam, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, 2009.

Headliner, Spoken Word Performance for Black History Month Poetry Open Mic, Sponsored by the Black Student Union, University of Louisville, Louisville Kentucky, February 2010.

Host and Performer, Fresh Mic., Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, Fall 2010

Host, “Fresh Mic,” Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 2010

Host, “Fresh Mic,” Performed Alongside the Fresh Pham, Student Sponsored Poetry Open Mic, Tennessee State University Nashville, Tennessee, 2010-2011.

Headline Performer, Spoken Word Performance, Event Sponsored by the Ball State University Multicultural Center, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, 2011

Headliner Poetry Showcase, Black Student Association’s Poetry Open Mic., California State University Northridge, Los Angeles, CA, 2012

Oral Interpretation Performance, USC Greater Debater Symposium, University of Southern California, Pasadena, CA, February, 2014.

Invited Lecture, Graduate Class on Hip Hop Theatre, part of the MFA Acting Program, Penn State University, College Station, Pennsylvania, October 2015.

Headliner, Poetry Reading, Black Student Alliance, Arkansas Tech University Russellville, Arkansas, April 2015


Performance, “(I)sland T(Rap),” American College Theatre Festival Regional Competition, Region Six, San Angelo State University, San Angelo, TX, 2017

Performance, “(I)sland T(Rap)” and “Black Book,” TheatreSquared, Professional Theatre of Northwest Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, 2016; 2017; 2018
Invited Performer, The Lincoln & Douglas Debate Scholarship and Workshops, The Illinois College Debate & Forensics Team, Jackson, IL, February 2018

Performance, “(I)sland T(Rap),” Northwest Arkansas Young Professionals Summit, Walton Art Center, Fayetteville, AR, August 2018

Performer and Workshop Facilitator, “(I)sland T(Rap),” The Rogers Academy, Rogers, AR, summer 2018

Performer and Workshop Facilitator, “(I)sland T(Rap),” Dollarway High School, Dollarway, AR, summer 2018

Performer and Workshop Facilitator, “(I)sland T(Rap),” Parkview High School, Little Rock, AR, summer 2018

Performer and Workshop Facilitator, “(I)sland T(Rap),” Lakeside High School, Lakevillege, AR, summer 2018

Performer and Workshop Facilitator, “(I)sland T(Rap),” Little Rock Central High School, Little Rock, AR, summer 2018

Performer and Workshop Facilitator, “(I)sland T(Rap),” Bentonville High School, Bentonville, AR, summer 2018

Performance, “(I)sland T(Rap),” Theatre Row, United Solos Festival, New York City, NY, October 12, 2018


Performer, Youth Bridge, Northwest Arkansas Rehabilitation Center for Youth, Fayetteville, AR, 2016-2018

Performance, “(I)sland T(Rap),” performed at the Miltby Theatre, Madison, Wisconsin, January 8-13, 2019

Performance, “(I)sland T(Rap),” performed at the New Visions Charter school, South Bronx, New York, February 7th, 2019

Performance, “Black Book,” performed at the Abilene Convention Center, Abilene, Texas, Feb 24-28, 2019

Performance, “(I)sland T(Rap),” performed at the Bats Theatre, Wellington, New Zealand, Mar 14-18, 2019
Performance, “(I)sland T(Rap),” performed at the Zanzi Bar, Dunedin, New Zealand, Mar 21-14, 2019

Performance, “Black Book,” performed at the Kennedy Center, Washington D.C., Apr 16-20, 2019

REFERENCES

Amy Herzberg, MFA
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Department of Theatre
University of Arkansas
Phone: 479-575-7391
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John Stanley Walch, MFA
Assistant Professor
Department of Theatre
University of Arkansas
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Valandra, PhD
Assistant Professor & AAST Program Director, BA, MBA, MSW, PhD
School of Social Work and African & African American Studies
University of Arkansas
Phone: 479-575-3525
Fax: 479-575-7510
Email: valandra@uark.edu

Tommie Lindsey, Ed.D. (Honorary)
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CREATIVE RESEARCH AND RESOURCES

During my time at the University of Arkansas I grew attached to and performed in multiple artistic communities. Whether it was Hip Hop Theatre and verse based theatre, or performing my own solo plays or pieces by others for social justice communities and for inmates on Death Row, or performing internationally at the New Zealand International Fringe Festival and nationally at the United Solo Festival off-Broadway, or competing at the Kennedy Center’s American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF), all of these communities and experiences helped shape me. On this journey, I also learned about the prestige and recognition solo writer/performers can receive, such as the Tony Award or the Outstanding Solo Drama Desk Award, which showed me the validity in solo performance and one person shows as an artistic path. In addition, I was also able to act in plays that I did not write and learn more as an actor and writer from those experiences. This section explores and explicates and documents my creative research and resources that helped build my artistic tool-box. These include roles I played on stage and screen, plays and films I wrote, theatre and film festivals I participated in, as well as my creative influences across multiple mediums. This is not intended as an academic breakdown of the works cited, rather as an autoethnographic response to these primary experiences and a reflection of how they influenced my style and artistic growth.

Acting: Roles Performed

During my time at the University I was able to play these role at either the University or TheatreSquared, the professional Equity theatre in Northwest Arkansas.

Play: All the Way by Robert Schenkkan

Role: Bob Moses/Dave Dennis

Response:
This was the first play I ever was in, it also happened to be a professional production. I was in a supporting role that I would have to play two characters. Luckily, the pressure was not super difficult, because I was only really in two scenes. One being a scene between Bob Moses with Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael, and Robert Abernathy about the civil rights bills. Then there was the funeral scene where Dave Dennis, a member of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), gives a speech about being tired of the deaths during the Civil Rights era in the south. The piece meant a lot to me because it was during the semester Donald Trump was elected and I had just moved to the south in Fayetteville, AR. As an actor, I was able to watch Mitch Tebo play the role of president LBJ and carry an entire play with two acts. I was glad my first play was a professional production with a large cast because I was also able to transition into graduate school with professional actors. I was excited about playing Bob Moses/Dave Dennis because I was able to develop art that was politically charged with a decent story. The only problem I had with the play was how it depicted black men, but I did understand that it was the perspective of a white writer. For example, yes, Dr. Martin Luther King had affairs on Coretta but the playwright acted like the white politicians had done no wrong in their personal lives as well. I just wish that all the character flaws would be brought to the light in a historically accurate play. This got me thinking about how black men are often portrayed and seen on stage through the white perspective.

**Play: Lysistrata adapted from Aristophanes,**

**Role: Cinesias**

**Response:**

When I was casted in Lysistrata I was originally cast to be a male chorus leader, which was disheartening to know my first school production was a small ensemble role. But then the
guy who was playing Cinesius left the school and I was bumped up into that supporting role slot. I was excited to play the role because I would have about 10 lines on the mainstage for my first University play. I was excited to do an adaptation of Lysistrata because it was a classical play about women withholding sex to make the men stop fighting a pointless war. I thought this would be a great play to do because at the time America was having culture conversations about war and violence. Also, I was able to watch Spike Lee’s adaptation called “Chiraq” where the film took the concept Lysistrata and adapted it in the violent inner city of Chicago. I thought the idea of this film was a great idea, however, I believe the execution of verse in the film was not handle correctly, and the story was not rooted in Chicago’s truth and its narrative of violence, which made a disconnect for me. But the concept was still dope.

As Cinesius, I had a great time with classical text, I even enjoyed singing on stage for the first time and dancing without the pressure of doing a full musical, because the show was an adaption with contemporary musical dance numbers. However, I did not like that the costume design and director had me (and all the men in the cast) wearing thick cod pieces to simulate a boner. Now, I know you might be thinking the whole male cast had to, it was a joke. But when I think of my black body in a predominately white space, I am aware that as a black man it means something different. The symbol of me on stage with a fake erection chasing a white-women to have sex with me might be humorous and accurate to the text, but it is also that trope that supports black male bestiality. I did bring this up to the creative team, but they didn’t see it this way I was told it would be a “fun show” and to go with it. I went with it, but the experience lingers, and while I didn’t have the vocabulary to articulate it at the time, I know see they we’re not seeing the complexity of their choice of putting a black man in a cod piece, they we’re only seeing the duck not the duck/rabbit.
Play: Under the Porch by Paul McInnis
Role: Little John
Response:

It was fun to play and create the role of Little John in this staged reading of a student play at the University. Little John was the first time I had character with a significant amount of lines. Little John was the role of an older black man who had no family, but took care of those who cared about him. I appreciated that I was able to be in a piece that was about the black experience which was written by a black playwright who was developing their work.

Play: RISE Paul McInnis
Role: King Jimmy
Response:

In playing King Jimmy in this new play was an experience where I felt like I did my best to serve the story. This play was a blaxploitation piece with afrocentric elements. Unfortunately, I was cast as the black drug dealer who got out of jail, who then commits a murder and eventually is himself murdered. I did the work and tapped into the role and did my best job. But I was down that I had to play a trope of a black man that is a monster to the community after being incarcerated. Yes, the play was consciously playing with the trope, but it still was that. But it was a fellow classmate’s thesis, and I was glad to help him by playing the role as he envisioned it.

Play: The Champion by Amy Evans
Role: Bobby Hamilton
Response:
This play, was a world premiere at TheatreSquared and was my favorite role that I played by another playwright during my training. What I loved so much about The Champion was that I was with a professional cast of (mostly African American) actors that pushed me to a higher level professionally. I was able to work with a director of color who I admired, and I was able to watch a playwright of color who I adored, develop into a piece that I believe was absolutely incredible. The play is about a night in the life of singer songwriter Nina Simone and an encounter she and her band have with the police in a small southern diner during a tour in 1962. Bobby Hamilton was Nina Simon’s drummer, the youngest and fun-loving member of the band, and in the play the subject of police brutality. This was the only part of the process was that I had difficulty with was playing the fun black man that ended up being abused by the police. I was told I did incredible in the play, but it was difficult for me to be thrown down on the ground every night. One, because I have been in jail before and have been assaulted by the police, and having to reenact that trauma was difficult. And though it can be therapeutic to perform that trauma, it’s difficult to relive it in order for it to be authentic. But I was able to learn through this role that storytelling is the only way some people in the predominately white audience can connect and see these black narratives.

Play: Clybourne Park by Bruce Norris

Role: Albert/Kevin

Response:

I was cast in the double role of Albert/Kevin in Clybourne Park on the University main-stage. This play is a response to Lorraine Hansberry’s Raisin in the Sun, written by a white-writer, and I did not like this play. I felt like the piece relied on and the characters mostly were shaped by tropes that were black and woman. The play gave the black characters no agency in
the story they were only used for their race and social class to hear the white perspective more.

What I was able to learn about this play is that If I want to do a better piece on gentrification, then write the better play on gentrification, and I plan to….mark my words.

**Conclusion:**

I obviously played significant roles in my one person shows, but I will talk about those experiences that in my stage section of my Thesis Project Portfolio section.
**Playwriting: Works Created**

During my time at the University, in addition to the performance of others work, I was privileged to be able to write, create, and perform in three solo plays that I created for myself. These include (I)sland T(rap), Black Book, and Blackting. This trilogy of solo plays comprises my creative research while pursuing my M.F.A. The following gives a brief descriptions of each piece, the genesis, evolution, and hopes and impact for each play.

**Play: (I)sland T(rap): The Epic Remixology of the Odyssey**

One Person Show, Stage Play, 20 performances so far, 75mins, 62 page script.

I chose to make this piece, because I wanted to connect historical oral telling stories and the black contemporary experience.

**Short Description:**

One person dramedy, rap adaptation of Homer’s Odyssey where Austin Ashford beatboxes, plays the ukulele, raps, and turns into 8 animals.

**Long Description:**

Fresh off his sold-out performance Off-Broadway at Theatre Row, actor and playwright Austin Ashford presents (I)sland T(rap), a hip-hop riff about Black Ulysses on an Odyssey of self-discovery. This tour-de-force is a powerful exploration of a young artist of color navigating the turbulent waters of contemporary American culture while trying to find his authentic voice. Two worlds collide as Ashford mixes the traditional story telling of Homer with the contemporary voice of African-American Vernacular English. (I)sland T(rap) combines lyrical poetry, live music, and commentary on the Black experience to chart a soul journey on an exotic island where Black Ulysses discovers his place in a society full of gun-violence and oppression. Recently recognized by the Kennedy Center for Original Hip-Hop Script, this narratives dives into overcoming isolation through fantasy, myth, and escape.
Fringe Festival Synopsis:

A lyrical, mythic, musical solo-soul journey, (I)sland T(rap) is a retelling of Homer's Odyssey based on the black experience in America. The fusion performance follows the allegorical hero Black Ulysses on a quest to an exotic island, escaping a hostile society rife with discrimination and gun violence. Part Odyssey, part Jungle Book, part autobiographical experience, (I)sland T(rap) is sure to be a highlight of Fringe.

Genesis:

(I)sland T(rap) was developed at the end of my playwriting for one acts class. My professor John Walch told me you can put poems and rap songs in a play. When prior to that I only thought I could use dialogue and monologues. So, I enrolled in an adaption course with M.F.A. director Cole Wimpee who approached me about the play I wrote and asked if we could work on it in class as part of his project. We began to develop (I)sland T(rap) around the remix of Homer’s Epic poem the Odyssey, because as an English major for undergraduate studies I was exposed to historical text, but I wanted to use sampling and hip hop to make my own version of the heroic character of Ulysses, so a black male characters would be in roles that were not slaves or tropes.

Research:

The research I did to construct the play included of course looking at the source poem, The Odyssey. As the piece has anthropomorphized animals, I also looked at Disney classic tales like Jungle book and Lion King. I also read Joseph Campbell's A Hero's Journey and responded Campbell’s concept that a hero with a thousand faces still is the same hero, and started to look at what a Black hero’s journey might look like. My creative team and I also looked into art by Romero Bearden and Aaron Douglass.
Evolution of the Play:

(I)sland T(rap) really evolved when it was shared at the Arkansas New Play Festival in June 2017 as a one off production that the audience responded to. Then the play was put up as a one night only show at the University for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) as an invited production, then again for the ArkType New Works Festival, then again for KCACTF National in the Terrace Theatre. I toured a shorter version of the play for schools for with TheatreSquared’s educational tour. I then took it to festivals, including the San Diego Fringe Festival, the United Solo festival in New York, the KCACTF Region 3 as a Headline Keynote, and the New Zealand Fringe Festival and Dunedin Fringe festival. I also performed the piece for high schools in South Bronx high school and at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.

During the course of all these appearances, I have continued to refine the play depending on the context of varying lengths. I have many versions of the play, including versions which are 2-minutes, 5-minutes, 10-minutes, 30-minutes, 55-minutes, and of course the 75-minute full-length version.

Hope for Impact:

I hope that this play opens up conversations about black males dealing with suicide. I hope this play opens up the spectrum of how black males are received in society. I hope the impact of this play inspires people to overcome their internal fears and to become storytellers. I hope that (I)sland T(rap) can make it to Broadway for a solid run and eventually become a Netflix special that can then turn into a film with an amazing soundtrack.

Play: Black Book

One Person Show, Stage Play, 80mins
This piece developed from the gun violence in public high schools arguments that I participated during my experience in Speech and Debate.

**Short Description:**

Black Book is A One Person, tour de force, dramedy, that explores violence in public education at the intersection of Speech and Debate. At Tolson High School, a student was fatally shot, in the wake of this tragedy a former Great Debater arrives to teach the traumatized friends a master class on public speaking.

**Synopsis:**

Welcome to Melvin Tolson High School—it's summer school, it's hot, the barbwire fence is fixed, and a young African American boy has been shot, leaving his group of friends reeling from the loss and wondering if their voices can ever be heard. Enter Austin Dean Ashford, a former Great Debater, to teach a master class on public speaking and challenge this group of boys to speak out and give voice to their hopes and fears. Filled with pressing issues, inspiring characters, and graced with comic flourishes, this one-person dramedy debates what happens to young minds when our educational spaces begin to resemble a prison more than school and a place to learn and grow.

**Genesis:**

The idea of Black Book came about because I wanted to tell the story of what I dedicated so much of my life to with Speech and Debate. I also wanted to pay homage and tribute to the unsung black male coaches that influenced my life through my work. One major reason this play took off was because of a film made by Stephen Karam, who wrote Speech and Debate a play what was produced over 150 times and became a movie on Netflix. My frustration with this film arose when I noticed that this story was not what I had given a decade of my training to and
didn't tell my authentic story as a Speech and Debate communicator. So my idea really was for me to tell my story as a black male who had learned the highest level of code switching through the activity of Speech and Debate.

**Objectives and Research:**

I think one of the main writing objectives of Black Book was my attempt to make a piece that actually tapped into communities that are not recognized by theatre inside the theatre walls while still operational outside of theatrical spaces. The fact that black book has a study guide for students to identify themes through characters is what I believe theatre should do. Another element to having Black Book performed on the Main stage at University of Arkansas was the first time I had a lead role and we invited 130 students from an alternative high school to not only visit a university for the first time, but to see a play for the first time as well. I had a student after the show come up to me crying and explaining that the piece meant so much to her, because she had been bullied and now she wants to do debate. Another audience member came up to me and told me the play meant so much to her because she did Speech and Debate. The objective I had was to make sure that the piece informs my audience about the world of Speech and Debate and has the impact to create social change agents is my overall goal. I believe as a playwright I wanted to create a play where the audience has a role in the play as a class member. I wanted to have a play that could have actual debates and interpretation selections but still worked in a linear narrative.

The research that was conducted to make this play was a further dissection of Nilaja Suns’ No Child and she was able to showcase a classroom of students with just her on the stage. In No Child, Ms. Sun was able to make social commentary while framing a play within a play. This made me interested in the idea of using Speech and Debate and using Program Oral
Interpretation in a play. I also did research by watching Every Brilliant Thing on HBO. This solo play was really good at using the audience to help tell the story in a way that was not intimidating, but still intimate. I wanted the audience to really know how to do Speech and Debate by the time Black Book was over.

**Evolution:**

The evolution of Black Book was an interesting Journey. The play was originally called The Great Speakers then after a suggestion from the head of Directing did I changed the title to The Big Why, which eventually lead to the final title of Black Book. This play has transformed in a multitude of ways from the One Person Show class in 2017 to the Arkansas New Play festival in 2018 and then to the KCACTF Region 6 Festival in spring of 2019. The arc of the play is now more concise and I feel speaks to a deeper question not only in educational space, but also in theatre spaces and who these stories are for.

**Hope for Impact:**

I hope that the play encourages black boys to participate in argumentation around social justice issues in the activity of Speech and Debate. I hope the play informs people what the activity is and how helpful it can be for black boys to use the tool of rhetoric and argumentation and in going to Historical Black Colleges and Universities. I hope that the impact of this play helps raise the awareness of black boys being lost in the education system when they have so much to say.

**Play: Blackting for the Magical Negro**

One Person Show, Stage Play, 40mins

This piece was developed from my experience as being a black body training in a predominately white space.
**Short Description:**

This project discovers how do black bodies maneuver through predominately white spaces through the lens of acting technique. The setting and environment is in NorthWest Arkansas known for being 84 percent white and how does a black body with an objective or goal accomplish this goal in an environment not made for them. The only conclusion is the black body must learn to be a black actor—a Blacktor.

**Synopsis:**

Set on a blank stage with a stool in one of the most liberal-progressive southern towns in America. Blackting is a survival guide for a black M.F.A. student in theatre—a captivating black critique by a mix media griot. This multilayered triptych solo play defies magic, with subversive comedy, and heartbreaking pain through the view of a blacktor you are sure to learn more than technical training.

**Genesis:**

This project is important to me because it is my living medicine. While I have had to survive predominately white spaces for a majority of my life. It took a journey for me to understand that my black body has methods that are rooted in Afrocentricity and these methods have been used for years and exist. However, with education I was only exposed to Eurocentric methods which limited my foundation. I think this project is important because it infused Afrocentric methods that can help everybody expand their point of view as far as storytelling is concerned. This project is important to me because it gives black bodies a safe space in spaces were we endure abuse. This is important to me because we must continue to document and create literature that proves we are successful in these spaces so we know that we belong. This project
is important to me because it proves that my thesis can go beyond a written essay that nobody will read.

**Objective and Research:**

This one person show is broken into 3 acts. The first section is a standup routine about surviving whitetopia and the fear of the black man's large penis while incorporating the history of lynchings and how black men were incarcerated. Also, how some black men were sex slaves to white gay slave owners. In the second act, My stand up comic character speaks about wanting to have a black name, black males and therapy, and the moment when I was assaulted by local police. Then the third act is me performing a play in a play, that is not a typical trope role for black men. The play within the third act is called Black Herman “The Magical Negro”. Then I end the live show by bringing back the stand up routine and punch line in an epilogue and explaining to the viewer why I had to make this piece and destroy the magical negro myth.

I propose this project act as a catalyst for my artistic and professional growth because it will show people in my industry and fields that there is no separation between an artistic act and an academic act. That we should blend them together and allow them to both be validated. This is pivotal because I want my work to be enjoyed and discussed. I am the best person to carry out this idea because I have already done this with two of my other solo plays. (I)sland T(rap) which is touring internationally, and Black book which is touring nationally, but this piece blends so many different styles together in the demand of one person. I believe I am the best to articulate this message coming from a HBCU and graduating form a PWI for graduate school.

**Evolution:**

The evolution of this play I would say is my most interesting because new parts of the play get added or adjusted as I am living my experience. This play was one way then during the
one person show class and my classmates energies I would alter the piece. Then the play would develop in my graduate playwriting class, then the play would develop with my comic friends on the phone, then the play was showcased and I had a classmate tell me they didn't like the white people using the N word or dogs being racist. Then I added that in the play,, then there was a moment when a faculty member did not like the part about the dogs and I decided to make that a part of the play too.

**Hope for Impact:**

I hope to engage this project with the black community as well as predominantly white spaces and I also hope that this can spark conversation with all types of minorities. I hope to reach them by bringing this idea through the black lens and seeing what it can offer. I hope my impact will bring a blend effect to artistry, academia, and advocacy. I really want Blackting to operate as a healing space for black bodies that feel alone with no vocabulary for it. I will make sure that I am reaching out to black educators and students who struggle with navigating predominantly white spaces.
Artistic Influences

It took awhile for me to find my place in theatre, but eventually I feel I found it when I started looking at theatre artists who worked in a Hip Hop aesthetic and we’re also solo performers acting in One Person Shows they created for themselves to perform. These two forms of theatrical storytelling have influenced me as a playwright and actor.

One Person Shows

Writing and performing in my own work was a major key allowing me to feel ownership over my art and tell the narratives I wanted to tell, as opposed to waiting on roles that I was cast in. Some of my influences are John Leguizamo, winner of the Outstanding Solo Drama Desk and his domination of the solo form with his plays Freak, Spice O Rama, Mumbo Jumbo, Ghetto Klown, and, most recently, Latin History for Morons. Seeing how John was able to make a career in solo plays that won him runs on Broadway and even a Tony Award (and his work on Netflix) showed me that a career path as a solo performer is possible. Jonny Donahoe’s solo play Every Brilliant Thing that aired on HBO is also one of my favorites, and I love how in this play he handles audience participation by having them help read his list of all of the brilliant reasons to be alive. I was also able to meet Dael Orlandersmith, a legend in solo performance and even a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, however I was not a fan of her workshop at the University of Arkansas nor the performance of her new play Until the Flood about Ferguson and the death of Mike Brown. I did not like the play because it felt like she was blaming black people for their situation with Mike Brown and I had higher expectations coming from a black woman with her platform. But it was nice to meet her because I believe she has done amazing things for the form. I am heavily influenced by writer-performer (and Tony Award winner for her play Bridge and Tunnel) Sarah Jones simply because her characters are so clean and distinct and the audience can tell each character from each other simply through her vocal inflections and their
mannerisms. I have never been able to see her live, but from videos of her shows and her Ted Talks she is amazing.

The first One Person Show play I ever read in class was No Child by Nilaja Sun, which was amazing and I believe fully hooked me on my journey towards being a solo performer. When I read this play, which is about a theatre teaching artist teaching high school students how to perform, I thought the play was incredible in how it was a play within a play and she was able to bring students to life. It was a clear influence for my play Black Book, which also looks at a teacher trying to teach high school boys Speech and Debate. I was later able to talk to Nilaja on the phone and she gave me advice before San Diego Fringe Festival, and then she came and watched (I)sland T(r)ap Off-Broadway at Theatre Row. She told me “to be good to my body” and predicted I would eventually get into the Edinburgh Theatre Festival, which I will be taking (I)sland T(r)ap to in the summer of 2019.

I was able to see Anna Deavere Smith perform in California at Berkeley Rep while she was working on her new play about the incarceration system. I actually had auditioned to be one her poet facilitators, but was not called back. I wanted to see the play anyway, and like with Dael’s piece about Ferguson, I was not impressed. She did have different characters and a musician playing the bass on stage, but I wanted to see the back-to-back Tony Award winning solo performer. I respect what she has done to the game, but I don't think I got to see her in her prime. Positively though, I must say that seeing her work at the early stages of development taught me that no matter how many Tony’s you win, the process is always the process.

I was able to have a phone conversation with writer-performer Will Power, as we are both from the Bay, but when he saw a clip of my work he told me he doesn’t think I have what it takes to bring his connections/network to my performances and to do more work. I was
discouraged at first, but it served as motivation. I started working harder and feel I have proved him wrong, so a part of me is very grateful he said how he felt. I was introduced to the work of Daniel Beaty through HBO Def Poetry Jam and his poems “Knock Knock” and “Nerd vs the Nigga.” Then I was able to see Emergency (formerly Emergence-SEE!) starring Daniel Beaty and directed by Kenny Leon and that taught me a lot about being a solo performer and how to play multiple characters with through lines while using poems and songs. Having Emergency on DVD has served me well as a learning tool, as I went back to it while developing my own work and it provided me models of solo performers that are versatile. On Netflix, I watched Bo Burnham, a comic one person show performer who plays piano, guitar, does poetry, and does stand up comedy all in one set in a way that blends humor with social commentary.

The best comedic storyteller of all time, to me, is Dave Chappelle. His work ethic inspires me, as he dropped four specials while I was in grad school and one of them won a Grammy, this was all after his hiatus from the Chappelle Show and no one knew if he would make a comeback. Other performers who influenced me include Bernie Mac, Chris Rock, Eddie Murphy, Jamie Foxx, and Katt Williams. I had no idea stand up comedy qualified as a form of One Person Show, but it has certainly influenced my style.

Hip Hop Theatre

Incorporating Hip Hop in the theatre has been a major part of my development as a theatre artist and storyteller. I classify Hip Hop Theatre as verse-based storytelling rooted in Afrocentricity. Personally, it was extremely important for me to understand the lineage and trace the form back to the West African storytellers known as the Griots. Griots are rooted in Afrocentric storytelling, where the storyteller would teach history through oral communication before stories were documented.
I had no idea that Shakespeare was an artist who adapted a majority of his plays. Meaning Shakespeare was introduced to stories that already existed and adapted them from his perspective and for his current time. In one sense, Shakespeare was sampling, which is central to the Hip Hop process. This really landed on me once my Shakespeare professor, Steven Marzolf, introduced me to the theatre company the Q Brothers and their piece, “Othello, The Remix”, which is a Hip Hop remix of Othello. Then I began to study other Hip Hop artists connection with Spoken Word and Hip Hop with Shakespeare, like Akalala and the Hip Hop Shakespeare company, while listening to TED Talks by artist like Mc Mars. This prepared me for Kevin Coval and Idris Goodwin’s visit to University of Arkansas as guest artists leading a workshop in creating Hip Hop Theatre. When I met these artist I was able to watch how they utilized Hip Hop Theatre and develop its practice within theatre. Their workshop inspired me to continue to deepen my practice, my knowledge of the form, and my craftsmanship. This resulted in actual work in the professional theatre.

During my second year I was the Rap Coach for the play VietGone by Qui Nguyen at TheatreSquared. This was a pivotal experience because I was able to observe how Qui used rap as a tool to tell a larger narrative. Plus, I was working with Asian-American actors on a play about Vietnamese-American experience, and this was a culture I had never been exposed to. I believe my VietGone experience largely inspired the development of my “Bar 4 Bar” class curriculum, and my Hip Hop Theatre and Film course which I taught as a part of my Graduate Assistantship at the University of Arkansas.

Undoubtedly, the most impactful piece of the lyric-based theatre that I was involved in was a project called Prison Stories. This was a project that was led by master storyteller Kathy McGregor, theatre artist Troy Schremmer, and University of Arkansas professor and poet Dr.
Geoffrey Davis. The idea was to work with death row inmates in the state of Arkansas, develop poetry with them, use their poetry as the basis to make a play, then have that play read on Death Row with professional actors for the inmates. We then took that play outside of the walls to be performed for various communities. Being part of this project affected in ways I cannot fully describe, but the experience of really hearing their poetry, making them into raps and beatbox riffs, and playing the ukulele with Death Row inmates that look like me and realizing they are also artists with a story fundamentally informs the type of art I want to create. This is what storytelling is about. This is impactful. This is how stories can actually heal and improve lives and advocate for social change.

Festivals

Festivals might seem counter-intuitive to list as an influence, but my experience at various film and theatre festivals over my time here have shaped me into the type of theatre artist today. My experiences at these festivals have also deeply influenced the work I create as I’ve learned my shows need to be mobile and built to tour. The following are the festivals I attended and a little context on how they impacted me.

San Diego International Fringe Festival

The 2018 San Diego International Fringe Festival was the very first fringe festival that I ever attended with my first solo play (I)sland T(rap). This fringe festival taught me a lot about what it takes to travel a solo show independently within festival structure. (I)sland T(rap) was given five performances at the Bristol Hotel in downtown San Diego. I learned what it was like to do a quick tech for a show, what it is like to do a preview performance to get an audience to want to come to your show, how to promote your show with reviews and by going to other shows in the festival. At this festival, I was housed with a kind married couple that has “Fringed”
all over the world and they gave me a lot of practical, real-world guidance on how to make performing in “Fringes” a career. I was fortunate enough to win Outstanding Solo Performance at the San Diego Fringe, as well as The New Zealand Cultural Exchange Award, and BEST OF FEST. This all came with an invitation to perform internationally in the New Zealand Fringe Festival.

**United Solo Festival: New York City**

This was my very first visit to New York City ever and I was debuting (I)sland T(rap) on 42nd Street Off Broadway. I was given a Friday night slot in October which was an amazing opportunity to bring people to the show, which still was difficult as I had to promote a show that cost 50 bucks in a city I was not from. Through my network, I was able to get important people in the room like Agents, Artistic Directors, and arguably one of the best solo performers in the world, Nilaja Sun. The single performance ended up selling out and I was awarded Best One Man Show of 2018. This recognition has been on top of my resume and has opened up a lot more opportunities.

**New Zealand Fringe Festival**

The 2019 New Zealand Fringe Festival was held in Wellington, New Zealand. This festival was transformative for my career while in graduate school, because it was the first time I left the USA and it was to do my own original work as a feature show: (I)sland T(rap). This gave me perspective on what it means to be a black man coming from America. Additionally, tragically, two days after my arrival in Wellington, the ChristChurch Massacre in New Zealand happened. This was a mass shooting, where 50 Muslims were killed while praying at their local Mosque. I could have never predicted when I first made (I)sland T(rap)—which is (in part) about trying to recover from the trauma of gun violence on an island—how differently the piece would
resonate with audiences. I want to create art that creates room to heal, and I felt that this piece at this time was doing that work. This trip was eye opening on so many levels.

On a more technical side, my director was caught into a snow storm and missed the festival, meaning I had to do the entire festival by myself. Which called on me to find resources, like the woman on the technical crew who volunteered to design the lights on my show for free. My show was held at the HeyDome at BATS Theatre. I was also asked to play a live concert after one of my shows and the audience had an incredible time. They moved chairs away just so they could have room to dance. I felt like a professional artist, they were incredibly hospitable, and I felt a part of the community. I was awarded one of the festival’s top honors of BEST PERFORMER for 2019 New Zealand Fringe Festival.

**Dunedin Fringe Festival**

The 2019 Dunedin Fringe Festival in southern New Zealand was life transforming as well. At this festival I played at the Regents Theatre, which had 2,000 seats, and then performed a four show run at the Zanzibar. This festival allowed me to not only perform (I)sland T(rap), but also set me up in several unique ways, including giving me a concert in the venue on the main road and set me up do an entire stand up comedy set. I was able to use test some of my material from my solo show Blackting (which has a comic routine), and experience what it was like to perform comedy in a real stand up comedy environment. In Dunedin, I also taught students from ages 5-11 how to beatbox and play the ukulele at St. Clair Elementary school. Plus, I was able to perform and do a show on my birthday and since my birthday was hours ahead of the USA. It felt like my 29th birthday lasted for three days. I was awarded the festival’s top honors of BEST PERFORMER for 2019 Dunedin Fringe Festival. I also learned that Dunedin use to be call “New
Edinburgh” which is interesting because the next place (Island T(rap)) is booked to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival!

The Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF)

KCACTF has shaped my work and became a major part of my training. This festival has allowed me to develop two of my plays (Island T(rap) (2018) and Black Book (2019). Being able to do local performances at the University, and then be invited to perform at the regional festival productions, which finally led to a showcase at the national festival held Kennedy Center has taught me a lot about developing a play over time as well as developing relationships. KCACTF taught me the need to have my scripts well-formatted and professional as well as how to produce a play for a festival as a production independently. Over two years, my plays won a total of 17 awards from KCACTF, and this recognition has opened doors for me and is allowing me to take my work across globe. It would not be possible for me to have so many of these other opportunities if it were not for this festival; the recognition from the Kennedy Center is critical in developing theatre artist like me who are still in training.

The Arkansas New Play Festival

For three years in a row I have participated as an actor in the Arkansas New Play Festival and for two years in a row my plays have been showcased. Each time, I have helped develop a play, learned how to dissect a play, and I have become a better theatre creator and collaborator in general. Being part of the development on the play, The Champion before I started grad school allowed me to work with professional actors and know the standard of great work ethic and talent. That opportunity allowed me to be in the world premiere of the production which then opened the door for me to have a place to stay when I visited Amy Evans in New York. Then being able to develop We Swim We go to War and be able to develop (Island T(rap) was
incredible because I met an Artistic Director and Playwright that work in the Bay Area back home where I live. I was also able to develop (I)sland T(rap) with a dramaturg that I adore in Amy Evans again, and then I was able to develop (I)sland T(rap) before the University performance for KCAC'TF later that November. This was also helpful because my third year in training I was in the play Amongst the Western Dinka and the same director on that project, Dexter Singleton, worked with me on Black Book. This festival was why I was able to have my first black director on one of my plays. I did two performances of Black Book (one at Crystal Bridges) and wrote and rewrote a lot of pages during the two weeks. This work all paid off as it helped get the script into shape for the fall performance at the University for KCAC'TF.

**Conclusion:**

At the University, I also performed (I)sland T(rap) at the ArkType New Works festival at the University of Arkansas with the playwrights that were graduating before me and develop (I)sland T(rap) before it went on a high school tour which later traveled to the San Diego Fringe festival. Mostly, all these festivals taught me the importance of New Play development, because at each Festival, and with each audience, the work of developing the piece continues.
Film

I love being a theatre creator and my training as a theatre artist is the foundation for my journey into film as well. Film is important to me because it allowed me to understand different story structures and learning how to make my own films also gave me agency over my artist path. Also, in the film industry, representation is a big issue, and representation aligns very much to the work and how I want to be represented as a Blacktor. In my opinion, the current state of race relations in the United States is built on fear and ignorance. We are at a time where all races are extremely divided. In 2018, we still have moments where minority groups celebrate with phrases like, “Look we just had our first black….” fill in the blank. We are at a time where there is still so much to accomplish, yet we are still saying there is the first black person to do something. We should have passed those racial conversations years ago. This also does not take into account for the “first Asian or first Hispanic person to do something”. There are major strides to be made in race relations in the United States of America and understanding the cultures that must coexist on this soil in order for us all to have life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. However, like any state of being we can fix our situation. But we must be prepared to acknowledge where we fall short, and accurately access where we are now. Because clearly now we are at a time of survival. We are at a time where black bodies are murdered and everyone is not enraged, everyone is not in pain, everyone is not pushing forward to make a change and making this country, the United states of America, a land where understanding and coexisting can happen. But in order to make change we need a collective feeling and emotion to push and propel not just legislation but the mindset of how we view fellow human beings.

If my stories create space to heal and to reset the bones of broken narratives this is a narrative I want to reset, and this is where I believe film comes in. Like theatre, film and video offer an opportunity for an intimate story to be told, but unlike theatre film allows these stories to
be told on a massive scale. Film, television, viral videos, webisodes allow a large number of people to watch the same story on film in the safety of their home or a theatre and not be judged. This allows an individual to have an uninterrupted experience with the other. As a society that struggles with race relations in America, it is imperative we utilize and expand our knowledge though film, because film can allow an individual human being to feel empathy for another. It is the filmmakers and their soul squad’s job to tell the story as truthfully as possible. Creating a film, in itself is a community act, which allows human beings to come together in a time of chaos and fear and work on something creative. Our society needs to do more creative projects together in order for us to understand our traumas in detail and see each other as human beings. In addition, the way the film experience is set up, it is the perfect window to lessen the distance between human beings and heal race relations. We as a society have the capacity to make films that help other cultures understand the pain and joy that exist in blackness without using tropes and negative caricatures. Imagine the power of those stories being told. That time is now and is starting to open up. We just need more stories and more support to break this glass ceiling. In my opinion the time is now to heal our country's race relations and I believe film is a powerful tool to do this work. Film has the power to heal traumatic experience and influence people in ways that are more accessible to all people.

**Films that Influenced Me During Graduate School**

**Birth of a Nation**

As I was transitioning into Graduate school for theatre, Nate Parker created the film Birth of A Nation. This film won the Sundance Film Festival and was purchased by a major studio. The film was the story of Nat Turner who was known for an American Slave revolt. This film was also revolutionary because it re-appropriated the title of the first American blockbuster,
“Birth of A Nation” which was a film about white men in blackface chasing white women in the 1930s and the KKK coming to save the white woman from the black savages—super problematic, I know. So, what Nate Parker did was take the name Birth of a Nation and educated America about Nat Turner—super subversive, I know. This film influenced me in a multitude of ways. One being that the film was historically factual and based on a real person (Nat Turner) who was a preacher and was leading slave revolts in America. A story like this has never been told on the screen let alone created by a Black filmmaker. I was informed by the film and emotionally moved by the narrative and the performances. For me, as a Black male to see a film like this while I was transitioning into a longer storytelling form was pivotal as it inspired me to also tell stories that had racial edge and grit to them.

As an influence, I must include Oscar Micheaux a major pillar in black filmmaking from the 1920’s. Oscar Micheaux was a game changer during his time with the original response to Birth of A Nation, and the film Within Our Gates. A Doctoral Candidate in History, Mr. Hughes, introduced this film to me from his Master thesis work at the University of Arkansas. Mr. Micheaux's response film was a silent film that was extremely radical for its time and proved Black excellence existed during the times of extreme violence on black bodies.

Get Out

In my first year of graduate school the Film Get Out by debut filmmaker and director Jordan Peele broke box office records and rotten tomato reviews. This film was a black horror film but was labeled a comedy for the Oscars (which is another conversation). The premise of the film was innovative for a lot of reasons. One, the film took the idea of horror and thriller and allowed us to see it through the Black body lens which is something we usually do not see on a major scale. The film infused suspense and humor, but still used the tension to build horror and
fear with race issues. This film inspired me because the story is about a black male in a 
predominately white space and the nuances of navigating those spaces correlated to me being the 
only black male in my program while attending University of Arkansas a predominately white 
space and being the only black male.

**US**

I was not sure if I was going to include this piece in my thesis, because I literally watched 
the film the week my thesis was due. However, Jordan Peele’s sophomore film, Us, starring 
Lupita Nyong’o and Winston Duke was an absolute master-class in cinematography and 
storytelling. The storyline of the film was amazing as it bounced back from a 1986 Santa Cruz 
beach boardwalk amusement park in California (my home state) and to the current time. But the 
film had major political charge as I recognize that US also can stand as an acronym for United 
States and the structure of the film had a flashback that linked up to the current time and broke a 
structure for me that I was not aware of. The film also did a great job with symbols and how 
those symbols were used to translate messages. Us also had an amazing balance of suspense and 
humor at the same time. This film and genre that Jordan Peele is developing with Black 
characters as the leads and the protagonist inspires me as a filmmaker.

**Sorry to Bother You**

I personally believe the best film of 2018 was Sorry to Bother You made by Boots Riley. 
This film was amazing because it was a mix media genre film, similar to how I mix genres in my 
own work. I enjoyed Sorry to Bother You because the film infused science fiction with social 
commentary and had historical themes with a message that was incredible to me. As soon as I 
watched the film I knew it was the best thing that I had seen up to date. The way the film dealt 
with protest and police brutality and also commented on slavery, prison industrial complex, and
code switching was everything that I wanted from film or story in general. The film also commented on the Willie Lynch theory at the end, but that is another thing. It also was filled with motifs of nonviolence such as a domestic dispute being depicted by a fight over bed sheets and a verbal altercation being subverted into a battle of compliments.

**Black Panther**

If I am going to talk about films and how they influenced me I have to mention Ryan Coogler and Marvel's Black Panther for absolutely changing the way a film featuring an all ensemble is received critically and popularly. The film was fantastical and it was BLACK and it did extremely well globally and broke the myth that Black films with Black cast can not do well Internationally. I actually think the film did a great job of bringing people together globally. I also was inspired by the way the film created an experience for everybody part of the African Diaspora with the release of the film.

**Moonlight**

Watching Moonlight beat La La Land at the Oscars while I was in Graduate School was a major inspiration to me. One, because I do believe it was the best film of the year. Two, it was made by a Black director, and the story was by a Black playwright who adapted a play they had written to the screen and gave it a unique three act structure. The piece also talked about Black male homosexuality and how the black body has difficulty growing and developing in toxic environments. Though, I am not homosexual I was still moved by this story as a black man. I was able to empathize with this story and saw somebody who looks like me in a non-traditional love story that was received well nationally.

**The Hate U Give**
The Hate U Give was inspiring, because one it was a successful adaption of a successful book. This always reminds me as a writer how well novels and long prose transfer onto the screen. The story also featured a Black girl who has to struggle with code switching and being involved in two different worlds at one time. I felt this piece dealt with black communities and policing really well. I remember being in tears watching this film multiple times. It was raw and edgy, but it was the best emotional arc I had experienced in film.

**Blind Spotting**

I was impressed by the Bay Area Film by dynamic duo Rafael Casal and Daveed Diggs called, Blind Spotting. The film won major awards at the Sundance film festival and then was picked up by Lionsgate for a major release. This film had my attention because it had Hamilton the musical star Daveed Diggs in a film. As a poet and rapper I grew up as a fan of Rafael Casal, and thought he did a great job creating a film about gentrification, incarceration, race, and gun violence that was not corny. I think the film was really amazing how it also used spoken word poetry and rap in it’s storytelling. Yes, I have seen this done in theatre, but the transition to the screen was incredible.

**#BARS Medley One and Two**

I must add in the #BARS Theatre Workshop Medley that Daveed Diggs and Rafael Casal host at the Public Theatre. I was able to watch these two half hour specials and see adaptations of films, and books, and TV shows into Hip Hop Theatre that was recorded and then put into film! The Bars Workshop is something I use to set up my structure for teaching Hip Hop Theatre and Film because they were creating live Hip Hop theatre and then adapting it into film with live recording.

**After Party**
I was also influenced by the Netflix show After Party with rapper Kyle. Kyle is a big rapper in the new wave of rap, but he made his acting debut in this film. The reason why I think After Party was a great film was because it utilized rap and mixed into the through line of story and it all made sense. I really laughed at the movie and the lyrics were not only, good but they were executed correctly and added to the narrative, making for an awesome experience.

**The Get Down**

The T.V. show that set everything off for me is The Get Down written by the playwright Stephen Allen Guris. One, the screenwriter wrote the play Between Riverside and Crazy, which was a play I admired and used a monologue from for my URTA audition to graduate school. Also, he was able to develop a T.V. show that talks about the birth of Hip Hop in the South Bronx, the political climate and racial complexities in that community, while infusing music and spoken word poetry and rap all into one television show. They even got some animation into the show. The show was, unfortunately, cancelled. I was a huge fan of the show for having hour long episodes that were so rich with knowledge and strong storyline that made melodrama interesting to me again.

**My Own Work in Film**

**Black Bones**

Being a part of the Nate Parker Film Institute while I was in Graduate school was a major game changer for me. I was never formally trained in film and I came from no theatre background, but I desperately desired to be an amazing filmmaker. So, being accepted into the Nate Parker Film Institute and learning all the aspects of film and seeing how I could fuse it with an Afrocentric method was phenomenal for me. The process of developing this short film was immeasurable. Before we dove into development we had conversations about healing, the
importance of Sankofa to Afrocentricty, and we built a community within ourselves that became sort of like a family. Then we worked on the process of telling a story.

For me, I was extremely excited about working and being a student at the institute, because I was able to learn every aspect of the film making process without any disruptions. I was so happy that the film idea, the pitch, I had created was selected by the committee to be the short film that the team made. My first film idea ever was going to be made into a short film. I was so excited and at the same time nervous, but I was helped by an amazing writing team. Eight other writers and myself stayed up for 22 hours to write an entire film and then the next two days we shot the film. Plus, I was able to be an actor in the film and I composed three original songs for the soundtrack. One of the songs made it into the film! The experience was then even better when I was invited to introduce the film at the Pan African American Film Festival in Los Angeles California. The film Black Bones actually ended up SELLING OUT. My first LA film premiere the film had no more seats, and standing room only while I was in graduate school.

**True Detective**

While I was in graduate school for theatre I was able to work on an HBO television show that was shot in Fayetteville Arkansas. True Detective inspired me because it featured a black male lead and incredible actor, Mahershala Ali, A two-time academy award winner for best supporting actor. I was able to be a stand in for Mahershala for two days of shooting downtown by the Global Campus. Also, I was able to be an extra and watch Mahershala work hard in a scene that was shot at Herman’s BBQ on College Ave. I also was called back and offered a principal role however that did not work out, but I was honored for the offer. I was blessed in plenty of other ways to get a chance to work on and observe a premium network television show
while in graduate school and be close enough to watch an amazing black lead work a major limited series.

**Fayetteville Film Festival: (I)land T(rap) Short**

My first film festival, I entered the “Pitch It” contest and pitched the idea of (I)land T(rap) the short film. This was the first year that the “Pitch It” contest existed and my pitch won out of 45 pitches. My pitch was basically to take my one person show and make a digital short version so it can be distributed to children and others. The film will be released at the 2019 Fayetteville film festival in October. I am currently in pre-production and will be shooting the film in the Spring of 2019. This film also has a soundtrack and we made a go fund me to help raise money on top of $2,000 dollar Pitch Award. We will receive assistance from Rock Hill Studios to help make the film.

**Black Book Super Short**

Working with director and editor Denzel Jenkins (a current Master Student in the Documentary program at the University of Arkansas), I was able to make my first short film. We took my second solo play, Black Book, and made a super short film at the University of Arkansas with Visonari foundation. It was a one-day shoot with a three-man team. The video has been posted online as a digital short and has amassed over 10,000 views. I also used the shot list (included in the exhibition section) for the film in my Hip Hop Theatre and Film course to show my students what a shot list looks like when you are transitioning your work from the stage to the screen and thinking visually.
Classroom/Pedagogy

In this section of my portfolio I would like to highlight my work as an instructor and as a researcher. First, as an instructor at the University of Arkansas I was able to develop an inaugural course called “Bar 4 Bar, or The Hip Hop Theatre/Film workshop.” In this course we studied how verse based storytelling is innovating the stage and the screen and how to generate our own work. Second, I created an academic writing sample called, “Afrocentricity”, which argues the need of the Performance of stories for the performance studies field. The reasons I wrote this paper is because I believe academia is limited by not adopting Afrocentric methods in storytelling spaces.

While at the University of Arkansas I was able to develop the first ever Hip Hop theatre and film course. I believe that adaptation/hip hop through the mediums of theatre and film are growing at a rapid speed. This is my chance to allow academia to work for people who love to create stories in this new wave of genre. This started when I would teach workshops until people wanted me to teach an entire course. This class teaches students with absolutely no background or history the history of hip hop, how to rap and act. Then we create a hip hop stage piece that we then adapt into a film live recorded version. See sample syllabus in appendix.
Reflecting on the Magical Negro:

As difficult as it was to grow here, I did grow and I am grateful for my experience and how it can allow others to benefit. I believe in my talent and in my work ethic. I was a high school dropout who had to get a GED. After my best friend committed suicide and I spent time in jail, I thought I might do the same. However, my story has been one of redemption and one of adjustment. Black men are one of the most undereducated demographics in our country. One day, I hope to say I went from GED to MFA, then GED to PhD, but did so in a way that was authentically me. It is the stories I will continue to tell and the stories I will continue to encourage the youth to write that will shift how we look at performance, and shift how we look at the black men in America as labels and statistics. Below is my Facebook post about my experience the night I noticed I was not a magical negro.

“Tonight’s rehearsal was long. I forgot my phone charger at the theater. So when i got home. I walk to corner store to get a new one before my big day in the morning. As I'm walking to get a new charger, I see a cop car slow down.. and then they pass me. So, I go to the corner store to get my charger and USB and decide to walk the other way home..(I don’t like to interact with police, and do my best to avoid) but then I see the cop pass me again on another street. This time I keep walking straight, but then the cop turns around and comes my way. He slows his car all the way down and then he gets out abruptly... Door still open.. and ask me, who I am and what am I’m doing here so late. And I freeze.. hands up…everything.

This cop is white and larger than me. Plus, it's almost midnight, no witnesses around AT ALL and I'm in a black hoodie. I obey commands...give my ID... Get frisked. Hands on the hood. And I'm alone in a white town... Sad to say, but I am use to this now.. and I could feel that this is what happens to help other people feel safe... I've grown to accept that... the part that frustrates
me is. The cop says he can tell I'm scared... And that is what frustrated me. He can tell... He can
tell I have had bad experiences.. he could feel the fear I had, and why I would not put my hands
down. He could hear my prayers while my hands were put behind my back..

   And I don't know what motivated him to say " we are all people.. you and I.. we are all humans"… but shortly, He drops my wallet and I hesitate to move at all, but I start to apologize
   and tell him... in my most less intimidating code switching voice.. if it is ok with him. I will pick
   it all up officer.

   But he says No. Why would I pick up something he dropped. And then the Cop picks up
   everything.... I wait and sit on the curb like the portrait we usually see.. of a black man on the
   side of a road with police in power and a black man waiting to be permitted to walk while black
   again....

   I am told I can leave once he makes sure I have no warrants or drugs on me.. But while
   he looks at my stuff. He sees my Wiley College key chain and ask about Wiley. I tell him it was
   my undergrad and I'm short with him, because I just don’t want any problems..and that's when he
tells me he has a GED...and instead of saying me too....

   I just try not to cry... and keep my hands visible..

   Eventually, I am let go. I get up off the cu
   Report of a black man on the
   side of a road with police in power and a black man waiting to be permitted to walk while black
   again....

   I am told I can leave once he makes sure I have no warrants or drugs on me.. But while
   he looks at my stuff. He sees my Wiley College key chain and ask about Wiley. I tell him it was
   my undergrad and I'm short with him, because I just don’t want any problems..and that's when he
tells me he has a GED...and instead of saying me too....

   I just try not to cry... and keep my hands visible..

   Eventually, I am let go. I get up off the curb. Drop my phone from shaking and he asks if
   I'm ok....like I'm hiding something.... I say yes sir and I ask if it is ok for me to pick up my
   phone. He says yes. I shake his hand because I know I have to... and I walk home without any
   witnesses... all of my stuff in my hands, but I'm not holding any bliss. When I'm finally out of
   sight from the cop car, then I allow myself to cry.

   This is what I'm talking about when I say NOBODY CAN TELL ME ABOUT BEING A
   BLACK MAN in AMERICA.
I literally cannot control the body I was given and that it fits the description. I try to be positive so people can understand that life is what we make it, but I also want to make clear...no matter how many awards, no matter how much education, or how kind hearted I may be. I'm still a 6 foot black man in a black hoodie at night in a town that is white.

As much as I wanted to be calm and feel powerful. I was aware that if the cop would have been more scared than me. My legacy could have stopped tonight.

I still recognize who has the power
I still can’t hide from my body
I still say yes sir
I still spread my legs when frisked
I still shake in fear because I have had a couple of bad experiences with police.

But I do want to say thank God that I got to be one of the ones who walked home tonight in 2018. I may be over reacting... I may have been fine the whole time... But tonight was just one of those nights.

Now I have to go to this Walmart commercial shoot, class, and dress rehearsal for opening night this Friday.

Like nothing happened.”
Show Bible: BLacKting

An Episodical webseries written by
Austin Dean Ashford

BL\ae K·ting
'b\l,ack\ˌ ting/
Verb
PSYCHOLOGY
noun: blacktor, blacktress;
1. a person whose can not separate the act of being black and acting at the same time while maneuvering through predominately white spaces.

Blackting is a young urban television show in the same vein as Atlanta, Dear White People, and Insecure. This show is a musical dramedy that would fit perfectly for HBO, SHOWTIME, or STARZ premium television for young adult people of color audiences. As well as progressives in general.

The set up/premise for Blackting is what happens when a black graduate student in Theatre with a record loses his graduate assistantship. This issues brings on plenty of obstacles, like how is Austin going to pay for graduate school, find living wages for monthly bills, and actually learn his craft at the same time. To add more fuel to fire, Austin attends a predominately white institution for graduate school and wants to be an actor, but Austin can not learn the deeper levels of being a black body and how to navigate the space being the only black body in the space. Meaning Austin has nobody that looks like him or has a similar body to teach him. There is a major struggle, and push and pull because as much as Austin wants to create art and find his voice and spot in entertainment. He must make money to achieve his dream, and the dropout deadline for non payment is coming soon.

The story heats up when Austin creates a poetry writing workshop called “Lyrical Therapy University” and the creation of this workshop brings in a new character, “Dakota” aka “Vanilla Pac” a want to be rapper, who isn't really an undergraduate but is always on campus. Dakota can not write at all, but loves the hip hop culture and wants to be a mega rap star like his own favorite rap heroes. However, Dakota gets the idea with his manager/mom “Kathy” that they should hire Austin as a Ghostwriter to get Dakotas career going. Austin has a fall out with Dakota over the idea of being a ghostwriter for a white rapper named Vanilla Pac and definitely doesn't want to sell his original written material for himself. This is also difficult because hates the idea the hip hop has ghostwriters rap isn't like acting, rap is about being yourself...or is it... But Austin’s deadlines for paying for school force Austin to take on Dakota and Kathy as a ghostwriter for hire, but how does this affect Austin’s graduate school, and entertainment career for himself.

Episode Synopsis

Episode 1: “EMAILS”
PREMISE: What happens when a black graduate acting student (AUSTIN) is about to graduate, but must find a way to pay back student loans while pursuing his entertainment career. Austin
creates a poetry workshop, because of the departments lack of inclusion in storytelling, and meets a charismatic white male (DAKOTA) who needs a ghostwriter for his internet rap career? This episode focus on Austin’s difficulty to organize. The entire episode happens in Austin’s head. Trope: Emails.

Episode 2: “MOTIVATION”
PREMISE: Austin looks for jobs while in grad school and finds out that he has to prepare audition material for the university plays and doesn't know what pieces to audition with. Also Dakota’s Mom KATHY introduces herself to AUSTIN and brings forth a proposition to fix his career. How does she get AUSTIN to be a ghostwriter

Episode 3: “LEVERAGE”
PREMISE: What happens when Austin has his Graduate Auditions for Ozark University today and his bills are due. In The Lyrical Therapy University Poetry workshop Laurie admits to abuse in her poem. Kathy forces Austin to write by blackmailing his past.

Episode 4: “CALLBACKS”
PREMISE: Austin gets a callback for auditions after he thought he did horrible. EBAMU is disappointed in students auditions. Austin presents songs to Kathy. Dakota loves it Kathy is unimpressed. Austin suggest Dakota take workshop and it will help.

Episode 5: “UP ALL NIGHT”
PREMISE: what happens when Austin and Dakota record a track and Dakota loses faith in Austin's writing. Dakota and Austin stay up and finish a song. Dakota suggest to play it at a party to celebrate. Dakota gets into fight with frat boy who touched LAURIE. Dakota lost fight but d.j. shows respect and plays his song. Audience love it. Austin records it. Kathy is about to break off deal until she sees the video. Austin is late to class and finds out he didn't get casted.

Episode 6: “PROFESSIONAL”
PREMISE: What happens when Austin’s landlord ask for late rent. Kathy tries to pay for Austin’s school. Kathy goes off on desk person for school system. And then Jackie goes off on Dakota for fighting at the frat party. Kathy hires GUMDROP to director Dakota’s video. We also find out more about Michelle and EBAMU.

Episode 7: “BETTER THAN ME”
PREMISE: What happens when Dakota’s video is released right when Austin meets with party promoters to promote his open mic and they will only help if white cube will perform on the homecoming game day. And then in class Ebamu works the technique and why he stresses auditions so much. And then Kathy explains to Austin why the songs must come out soon. Dakota’s dad calls because he saw the video. And then in the Workshop while talking about open mic being rushed. Spencer enters..

Episode 8: FINALE: “GAMEDAY”
PREMISE: What happens when it is College football Game day, and the streets are so full of tailgating, but it is all so Bike, Blues and BBQ. And then when it is time to for WHITE CUBE to perform at the party. Dakota gets stage fright, and doesn’t show up to the party. And then the
party promoters (LANDO & SCOOTER) don’t promote open mic and it is a failure. And then
the Dean ask Austin about an incident at a pajama party. Austin writes an email after being
horrible at emails all semester.

STRUCTURE/TONE
Blackting is a show that plays with balance of two worlds. Austin’s education theatre world and
Austin Music career as a ghostwriter for a white hip hop artist.

ACT 1 (1-3) Introduces the characters and a problem. This shows what life is like at Ozark
University and some of the community Austin encounters.

ACT 2 (4-6) The conflict gets worse with Austin’s school life and his ability to pay bills force
major decisions.

ACT 3 (7,8) This is the climax of the series when we see everything go wrong and get worse for
Austin.

Blackting will have a MIXTAPE / SOUNDTRACK
With song titles being episode titles and 3 bonus tracks. Magic being the song from the show.
The shows theme song is from (I)sland (T)rap from Austin’s one person show in real life.

Blackting MIXTAPE -
By White Cube ft Benn BRoox

MAGIC
EMAILS
MOTIVATION
LEVERAGE
CALLBACKS
UP ALL NIGHT
PROFESSIONALS
BETTER THAN ME
GAMEDAY
AMBIVERT

Songs written by Austin. But would be rapped by the character White Cube so real musical
videos could be made to promote show.

CHARACTER BIOS
AUSTIN - A graduate Acting student who lost his assistantship and needs a way to pay for grad
school.

DAKOTA Limburger - A young white rapper who wants to be big away from Ozark University

KATHY Limburger - Mother of Dakota, a business woman who wants to sit at the big seat of
business tables.

STUDENTS
THOMAS - Socially awkward grad actor who loves musicals and flannel.
SAMANTHA - Know it all grad student, who already has equity card.
NATHAN - Grad MFA student who is in love with Samantha, and is a yes man.
JACKIE - Undergraduate poet and Starbucks barista.
LAURIE - Undergraduate poet and history major.
SPENCER - Student Government President and son of the vice president of the school.

FACULTY
MR. SKINNER - Undergraduate Acting professor.
EBAMU - Graduate directing professor.
MICHELLE - Theatre department secretary
THE DEAN - The Dean of the Theatre Department

Season 2: Episode Synopsis - BLACKTING

Season 2 Episode 1: “THE KEYS”
LAST ON BLACTING: Dakota’s rap video of getting beat up at a frat pajama party becomes an issue at Ozark University. The party was at the Vice President's house, and there was word that a University faculty member was there. Austin’s first open mic from his workshop was a bust, but the Department Chair still wants to support Austin’s idea of the spoken word poetry.

PREMISE: What happens when Austin’s Hip Hop theatre/Film class has come to the University, because of his spoken word poetry workshop and AUSTIN still has no assistantship. And then Vanilla Pac’s rap video ends up going to court and AUSTIN needs a lawyer... KATHY is ready to do bigger boss moves and Dakota has plans for his Empire.

Season 2 Episode 2: “THE WARNING”
PREMISE: What happens when it is MOVEMENT class for acting..it is weird.. Austin gets called to the vice president's office.. It is the first day of classes for Austin’s Hip hop theatre/film class. And then Vanilla pac has a rap beef diss released?

Season 2 Episode 3: “ROOKIE”
PREMISE: What happens when Austin sees Kathy making major drug deals with his neighbors that he doesn't trust. But Kathy is ready to make serious money because rap doesn't pay bills yet. And then Dakota has the campus interview with the president of Black student Alliance who is trying to expose Vanilla’s Pac’s appropriation. Kathy makes it clear she is going to sell these drugs and nobody will suspect her. And then Austin does the rehearsal of the prison stories play at the local church before meeting inmates.

Season 2 Episode 4: “JUST TO GET BY”
PREMISE: what happens when Dakota’s interview has clips and promotion of him being a trash rapper from interview...And then It is recruitment day for the department and there are freshmen there and high school teachers. Austin is asked to demonstrate what he is working on in lyrical therapy university. And then the department watches the video for Vanilla Pac magic and wants to know if he can teach them that. And then hank comes to visit Austin Hip hop theatre and film class while students work on a where you from poem.
Season 2 Episode 5: “PRIVACY”
PREMISE: what happens when Dakota’s IG gets hacked and he is worried about the release of the bad interview and he is working with Gumdrop to make a music video with Lil Boom and Ms. Yachty. And then Kathy buys an alarm system for her house, a mini van, and a storage to move drugs to keep innocent look. Also, one of Austin students approach him about posting their work on his IG and how he wants it to stop.

Season 2 Episode 6: “BARS”
PREMISE: what happens when police show up at Austin’s apartment to ask questions about neighbors and activity. But they ask him to come to station because apartment smells like weed. Austin shows up to class and does not have the duet scene memorized and professor lights him up in front of everybody in class about relationships with people. And then Dakota is challenged to a rap battle by Trough. Kathy has a close call with police and the drug game.

Season 2 Episode 7: “PAY ME”
PREMISE: what happens when Dakota is offered a deal to do a big concert for sororities and open for G eazy, but the girl he likes doesn't approve. And then Austin confronts Dakota and Kathy about how he is helping somebody else's career and living life on the line while Austin’s career will not take off at all. And then Austin’s account is low again and he has to pay for school, but pretty much doesn't get paid for anything. Austin does the performance for the inmates and gets inspired to write his own show. Austin busks with Ukulele downtown and only makes about 100 bucks and spends it all on weed.

Season 2 Episode 8: “UNDERCOVER”
PREMISE: what happens when an undercover cop goes to Dakota’s show and shuts down the party that he found out about from Dakota’s love interest. Dakota feels betrayed but gets connected with G eazy. And then Kathy scores big on drug deal and starts to flaunt her cash too much causing attention. The undercover cop hits on Kathy, but she uses him and blackmails him to keep quiet. Austin shuts out everybody to finish his one person show.

Season 2 Episode 9: “LO(U)”
PREMISE: what happens when Austin finally focuses on himself and has a black box performance of his one person show play about death row inmates. And then Dakota gets a little jealous of Austin and his talent. And then Kathy thinks real hard about this drug game, but considers not being a rap manager anymore.

STRUCTURE/TONE:
Blackting is an episodic series that plays with the imbalance of two worlds. Austin’s education theatre world with predominantly white people, and Austin Music career as a black artist who also is a ghostwriter for a white hip hop artist.

ACT 1 (1-3) Introduces new characters and then deepens the responsibility and risk from season one. This shows what the environment of the city/university is. Dakota and Kathy have larger ambitions than season one
ACT 2 (4-6) The conflict gets worse with Austin almost getting exposed as ghostwriter, and developing a one person show about death row inmates, Dakota’s emotions, and Kathy’s rise in the drug world.

ACT 3 (7, 8, 9) This is the climax of the series when we see everything go wrong for Dakota, Kathy, and Austin.

BlacKting will have its second MIXTAPE / SOUNDTRACK
With song titles being episode titles and 3 bonus tracks.

BlacKting vol 2 MIXTAPE -
By Vanilla Pac ft Benn BRoox
The Keys
Warning
Rookie
Just to get by
Privacy
BARS
PAY ME
SPOTLIGHT
UNDERCOVER
Lo(U)

Song written by Austin. But would be rapped by the character Vanilla Pac so real musical videos could be made to promote show.

CHARACTER BIOS
AUSTIN - A graduate Acting student who lost his assistantship and needs a way to pay for grad school.
DAKOTA Limburger - A young white rapper who wants to be big away from Ozark University
KATHY Limburger - Mother of Dakota, a business woman who wants to sit at the big seat of business tables.
HECTOR - Leader of the prison stories project
LANDLORD - Over Austin’s apartment complex
Lil Boom - male rapper under Vanilla pac
Ms. Yachty - Female rapper under Vanilla pac
Gumdrop - Vanilla pacs music video director

STUDENTS
THOMAS - Socially awkward grad actor who loves musicals and flannel.
SAMANTHA - Know it all grad student, who already has equity card.
NATHAN - Grad MFA student who is in love with Samantha, and is a yes man.
JACKIE - Undergraduate poet and Starbuck’s barista.
DAVID - Black student Alliance president that is in the Hip Hop theatre and Film Class
Truf - White conscious rapper that has beef with Vanilla Pac and want to expose him.
LAURIE - Undergraduate poet and history major.
SPENCER - Student Government President and son of the vice president of the school.

FACULTY
VICE PRESIDENT Johnson - The VP of Ozark University and the father of Spencer Johnson
MR. SKINNER - Undergraduate Acting professor.
EBAMU - Graduate directing professor.
Body traffic Instructor - visiting instructors for dance class
HANK - Head of playwriting and Austin’s new advisor
BUCKLEY - Head of Directing
SIMMONS - head of Costume Design/Make-up
HATCHER - Head of Lighting design
MICHELLE - Theatre department secretary
CHAIR CAIN - The Dean of the Theatre Department

BLacKting Season 3
In Season 3 of Blackting new major conflicts must be dealt with immediately! Austin is about to graduate and is not where he wants to be artistically while Vanilla pac is now a known artist regionally. Austin’s One person show has now gotten him some attention, but the topic is too harsh and places won’t pick up the show. Kathy is getting heavier into the drug game and might lose interest in being a rap manager for her son. Austin will graduate from grad school in this season and prepare for a PHD or begin his professional career.
The following is the shot-list for my short film of Black Book.

**B-ROLL Shots:** Wide, medium and close up shots of students using the book: turning pages and closing. Wide, medium and close up shots of Austin tying tie getting tighter and tighter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Audio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium shot (Mirror):</strong> Austin walking into bathroom (Coming into the frame) putting the black book down</td>
<td>NAT: Bell rings. Austin dropping bag and binder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium shot/Close up shot (Mirror):</strong> Putting on tie</td>
<td><strong>Austin:</strong> “Toy Boat, Red leather Yellow Leather, Unique New York, I am amazing, I am phenomenal, I have relaxed confidence, I can teach,... I can't do this”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Close up shot (Mirror):</strong> Austin’s mouth</td>
<td><strong>AUSTIN:</strong> Ughhhhh!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium shot (Mirror):</strong> Austin deflects from looking in the mirror.</td>
<td><strong>LINDSEY:</strong> What’s wrong why you huffing so loud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Lindsey dissolves in the frame)</td>
<td><strong>AUSTIN:</strong> I don’t understand how I got here, Lindsey! I don't need to be a babysitter for no high school kids who don't want me there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Same Shot:</strong> Austin conversates with Lindsey</td>
<td><strong>LINDSEY:</strong> Do you think you’re too good to teach kids who need you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Close up shot:</strong> Lindsey’s face</td>
<td><strong>AUSTIN:</strong> No. It's just that. I just wonder am I trying to relive glory days through some kids. I’ve been out the game for years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Close up shot:</strong> Austin’s face</td>
<td><strong>LINDSEY:</strong> Tolson High School is happy to have you. Now suit up, tie that tie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Close up shot:</strong> Lindsey’s face</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Lindsey dissolves out of the frame)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Close up shot:</strong> Austin’s face in confusion. Looks down at his binder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Close up shot:</strong> Betsy pushing a button to talk on the intercom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close up shot: Betsy lips talking to a microphone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close up shot: Austin eyes looking up hearing the intercom. Then looks down at binder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close up shot: Binder is grabbed by Austin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wideshot to Vertigo: Austin walking into the long hallway, looking for his classroom. Dashes out of frame to his classroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wideshot (Camera follows Austin): Austin enters classroom and walks to his desk.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wideshot (Camera circles to the back of Austin’s head): Two students on Austin’s left and two students on Austin’s right.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Shot: Daniel at his desk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Shot: Brandon at his desk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Shot: Austin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Shot: Brandon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Shot: Austin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Shot for each student(4 separate times): Students walk in front of the classroom to perform as they struggle with opening the pages in the book</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**NAT:** Bell rings

---

**NAT:** Sound of the button being pushed

---

**Betsy:** Good morning Tolson High School! We are so happy to have you here this summer! Just so everybody remembers The typical school year Rules still Apply. And always remember Wildcats. Make it a Great day or not the choice is yours!

---

**DANIEL:** What yo bummy ass laughing at Brandon?!

---

**BRANDON:** Don’t talk to me it too hot and you smell like charcoal and mold
Medium Shot: Jabari performing

Close up Shot: Austin putting on tie

Close up Shot: Pages in the black book turning

Medium Shot: Jabari performing

Close up Shot: Austin putting on tie

Close up Shot: Pages turning faster

Close up Shot: Austin putting on tie

Close up Shot: Jabari performing

Close up Shot: Austin putting on tie

Close up Shot: Black Book Closing

FADE OUT:
HARD CUT TO TITLE: “BLACK BOOK”
WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY AUSTIN ASHFORD

AUSTIN: Wow. that is fascinating! You two, arguing

Brandon: This is how we debate breh!

AUSTIN: That is not debate.

AUSTIN: Debate is all hip hop
Black book turn ya head like a beat drop---

This black book can translate messages like Hip Hop and being a DJ the way we use the binder to mix different genres together. A Good Dj can mix, old school, hits, and sketches and a great Interp speak can Mix, history, articles, and stories. This is you honoring literature
*TWO TAKES WITH BEAT BOX AND ONE WITHOUT*

JABARI: it cost 45,000$ a year to keep an inmate in prison
what if we cut that money in half
and used it on Pell grants for their education?

JABARI: Yea I’m Robin Hood.
and me and my merry men
came to JACK THIS EDUCATION LECTURES, HOMEWORK, SYLLABUS, and the EXTRA CREDIT TOO

JABARI: BANG -

JABARI: for every black body lock, down before they were read up -

JABARI: BANG

JABARI: for every black man shot,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>JABARI:</strong> killed, or beaten due to police brutality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>JABARI:</strong> BANG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Betsy:</strong> And always remember Wildcats. Make it a Great day or not the choice is yours!”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BARS
The Bars section of my appendix is included to express the rhythm, cadence, and some of the emotional work I did while I was growing as an artist. Music is a huge part of my work as well as poetry. Which is why I made a soundtrack to my thesis and these are the lyrics and haikus of poetry made that was not included in any of my plays.

SOUNDS OF BLACKTING - Soundtrack to Solo Play; Blackting

Feeling The Vibe

Feeling my vibe
No lie, my Vibe-ration
Produce more life
Then cries
With libation
They bite, my light
On site, no citation
But ima feel good
No hesitation

Vibe like a love bomb
In ya palms
Its a healing song
Grown from psalms
Beauty like moms
So i know where its from
We beat, we kick, we snare
Like it was a drum
It's the drummer boy
Pa rumpa rump rum
Twist middle fingers
And hide my thumb

Abundance is now
My ego is down
Straighten my crown
Glory is found
Through God in the clouds
And God in yo Eyes
God in yo vibe
So God on my side
Grateful for Grace  
*Spiritual light*

Absorbin my light  
Endorsin my shine  
Enforcin the grind  
Thoughts are aligned  
And now i feel like it’s my time

---

**Feeling Good**

*I flew away*  
*To the Ozarks*  
*Big Fish, Little Pond*  
*But i swim like a shark*

*Lived in the Dark*  
*Pray to God, for a Spark*  
*Like a Little John Starks*  
*Dunk from the Arch*  
*Built an Arch for the Love of the Art*  
*Even when critics try to tear it apart*  
*Create, create, create*  
*Elevate up to Mars*  
*Forget the clothes and cars*  
*Show them your heart*  
*Ukulele baby, can you please be my harp*  
*Where do i start*

*Before I started*  
*I was a dragon*  
*Heaving heavy hearted magic*  
*That is elaborate*  
*Like eww that flame too hot*  
*He need to practice it*  
*Light a match, and put wax to it*  
*Label it as a laxative*  
*That way we can sample it*  
*Flip it, and mathematic it*  
*Don’t stand like a manikin*
Are you famished, or panickin’
If you’re damaged, I’ll laugh again
I can’t manage to plastic
My inner savage a magnet
Attracted to get cabbage
Or living lavish then
Sit back while I’m practicin’
Practicum like an analyst
Inhibition no catalyst
Too much of that cannabis
But right now I’m so focus
You can all me philanthropist

CHORUS

I want to be a rapper and a actor
Shoot an episode, hit the road and tour after
Leave a set, do a set,
That is what i got a knack for
Take a beat, rip a beat,
That is what ill get a plaque for
This aint for the reward
This is for the rapture
I can’t die today, cuz i aint wrote my best chapter
Use to hoarder through horder
Now I barter through borders
Fabulous forever
Exuberant explorer
Excellence exemplifies
My etiquette and manner
Lyrical labber
Living with laughter
Original dabber
Changing up the standard
Call me x factor
Or Mr. Austin Ashford
High school dropout
But i got my bachelors
Calculated education
Call it double masters
No I’m not casper
But I’m running faster
Than a rocket ship
That dip down form Nasa

Straight from the Yay
Nickel and dime I made
That is the place I was raised
Critics and praise
Give me all the accolades
For my ancestors with chains
We build this place
But they still lock us away
Aye, listen to me
Give me some empathy
Sympathy, sympathize, similar humanity
Aye, woah
They said that killmongers dead
Just like that dude did his Dad
Knife through his chest
Murdered by african tech
Technically now, we have nobody left
To save all the women and men
And all the black children living out west
To save all the women and men
And all the black children living out west

This is Me

This is me beating up the hater in my head
My biggest obstacle is the enemy within
The opp of Austin
Got me exhaustin
The carbs I take in
So now i’m coughin
No chokin

This is it
I got to be legit
They weeding out the fakes
With rakes, and i'm equipped
To uber any stage
If it needs a lyft
I aint even got a car
But these bars take trips

I might IG
My seat on this plane
Just to show little bro
He can go do the same
My aunty, told me
He need to fix his grades
But no compreendo
If i don’t, do what I say
So this is it
I’m motivated and under-rated
Now initiating all of the greatness I kept inside
This is it
No more contemplating
I done put my grind in
This is transformation

And it’s time to get my crunches right
Develop my core
Til we explode
Dynomite
I’ve been underground
But no I won’t apologize
Focus on my Goddess
I don’t seen Apollo cry
Made in God’s image
But what Kind of God am I
To criticize the lullaby
O lord we polarized
No poloaride
For the genocide
Every time they rewind our pain it get minimize
No clue, they zoo
Us out until we ostracized
So i leveled up
Until im austin size
Add another sentence
And its maximized
But no capital crime
In capitals eyes

Libiran slavin
Critics behavin
Adjacent
To trump statements
With hatement
Aint no surprise
Stop hallucination
Call the congregation
Fix the situation
We makin
And save our lives

This is our chance
I was lesson learnin
Now I teach class
Workin my path
Teachin my craft
Every new song is better than my last
This is it
Moving at critical mass
And it be pitval
That I am lyrical
Most of yall typical
Spitting out trash

This not subliminal
Its unconditional
U not original
Pass like a give and go
Go like a marry go
Drench in my winter coat
Under the mistletoe
Lips be a miracle
It is habitual
Don’t let the missile blow
You crew is miniscule
Fakin like criminals
This is the ritual
Literal liberal
Breakin it down
All the way to the spiritual
I just want my residual
And they wait for the visual
But the feelin is so biblical
But i got to go.. Adios

Black Harry

Years done past
I don’t lost a couple friends
Remember when
We use to go and play pretend
Before ten
When we didn’t care about the trim
Just humans
Developin into Gems
Let’s cleanse
Our lens
And see where it stems
I was scared when
I hit and never called again
Can’t afford a baby
I ain’t got no benjamins
But if i told the truth
Would you ever call again
Cuz i aint got
Half as much, cash as him
And patriarchy
Said i need cash to be a man
Im apologin
And trying make a mends
Healing our wounds
While killin arguments
Ready or not
Here i come
Peak a boo
Oo
I can see what you want
Another jig a boo
Getting loose to the song
But I’m shakin shackles
That try to hold on

I lift my legs
To lyrics from lauryn
Theory of adam
Prayin to Zion
Split, my atom
Killed electrons
Now my tank full
Vroom chevron

Glass half empty
I can be beverage
Even if you vegan
And need a kale juice box
Got a bald head
But I’m growing out my beard lock
And I’ll shake my face
Till my beard drop
Can’t stop, wont stop
Gunnin like im black opps
I took the scenic route
Check out my backdrop
Black harry potter
And my wand can do the moonwalk

You aint gotta wonder
How i did it, or how i got it
Every other summer, winter,
I would dream about it
Use to be a runner
Sprinter, now we movin mountains
Im bout it bout it
And truly sorry i ever doubted
I know i found it
It’s astoundin, what’s around him
Pound for poundin, he a thousand
No need for clownin
Skilled allowed him
To use his prowess
Mama the proudest
Now my haters are soundin
Soundless

Honestly, You was never big us
Peep game, trump
You strange, lame, ambiguous
Real recognize real
And fareal, you ridiculous
You not a friend to us
The indigenous
Home of the slaves
And the cops killin us
We combust, and disrupt
The lust of injust
Murder who murder us
With a buck buck buck
David duck
They dangerous
And mamin us
With rehotoci
And language
They locked him up
The optimum
No optimus
They squeezin us
Until we bust
I bust this bust
Like buster bust
So let me bust

Interviews

Yea its been a while
But now i’m trustin women
Ever since I loved myself
I been vibin different
Best advice I got
Was to truly listen
And if they want to leave
Go ahead and let them
Remove them leeches
And make space for heaven
You aint got to worry
When you truly got connection
Its not all lost
Its all a blessing
This for them interviews
And them burning questions

I think im better now
I think Im healing now
I think it took a minute for me to just think it out
I think the therapy helped me to scream it out
Shrink it out
Ouch
My shrink took the wrinkles out
Maybe I’ll breathe it out
No analytical
Multidimensional
Think it’s confusing tho
If you ask me what I think
I think they nosey bruh
Don’t ask me what i’m doing
And not how i’m doing bruh

That might be alot
But that’s what im think tho
I think they jealous
And they never hide it well
I think they happy
My heart broken by that girl
I think when she said that
She don’t love me that she meant it
But i think , honestly
She still regrets it
And i think it takes a while for me to have forgiveness
I think right now
I need God to be my witness
I overcame the wicked
Even when its in me
I think that you toxic
And i’m thinkin that you mirror me
If you are a narcissist
Then narcissism in me
I think i should kill
All the part of you that kill me
I think they surprise
I survived and got the victory

But what does it matter
If opposition gets madder
Your brain is not scattered
And heart heals from fracture
Be your own pastor
Happiness is a factor
Acuna mata ta
Happiness is a factor

I think all this pain
Prepared me for my purpose
I think all my haters
Better get to workin
I think 2019
Ima make a million
I think 2020
Ima own the building
I think im stronger from that
I think im learning form that
I think im wiser with words
I think im bolder fasure
I think i looked in the eyes of all my fear
I think im aware of what makes me insecure
I think mental health makes all of this clear
I think that im grownin, young flourish like my beard
Marchin on forwards
I aint goin backwards
Put that on my mama and my daddy
That’s the ashfords
How you gonna hate
And you aint got a passport
Yea im getting paid
While i’m getting my masters
While they threw shade
I became a better rapper
Started at the bottom
But austin built the ladder

GED 2 my MFA

This my GED to my MFA
In 08, i didn’t graduate
Mama sad, i didn’t walk the stage
Love my Dad, but I brought him Shame
Story started as a tragedy
But we gonna celebrate on saturday
Better days, better things
Better pay, better prayers,
And better dreams

They don’t know why I feel this way
Yaydestrian from the yay
But i’m known from across the states
From my GED to my MFA
From Arkansas to the golden state
May 11 when i graduate
I was new and I changed the place
They won’t see a black man the Same
Independent and I made lane
And I did it without a chain
Wiley College, i great Debate
Off Broadway, my Solo Play

GED to my MFA
GED to My MFA

This a real celebration
Baby austin graduatin
Educatin education
Mass murder limitations
Form the attic to the basement
Free my mind from the enslavement
You can’t really tell me nathan
You can’t really tell me nathan
Life is really what you make it
Back home
Im getting famous
But attention never change us
Dominate the minors now it’s the majors
Black neyo, and i’m ownin the matrix
I’m not from here, but i feel like a native
21 rings because i’m persuasive
And i got more talent than yo whole favorite
Let me work it, work it, im activated

GED to my MFA
GED to my MFA

Who is scared of the pain
Fear is not in my name
Look at how far I came
Cole like im Jermaine
Obsessed im Insane
Own the Game
Lebron James
NIV or King James
Jesus Christ
Holy Praise
Never scared, not Today
Papa say, that’s not, that’s not, that’s not
How we operate
Write it down, put it on the page
Might lose it all, but not my strength
Might lose it all, but not faith
So let me say

GED to my MFA
GED to my MFA

Spent my Birthday
In new Zealand
And performed 6 weekends
Gettin MF paid
Check my thesis
I made this track
For my niggas
You know I got you
And you got Jesus
Im talking God for the Non believers
Im talking goals for the Big achievers
You know i gotcha
You know i needa

I know I sound arrogant
But I work for this
With no inheritance
Check my certificate

X2

GED to My MFA

Renaissance King

Buenas Dias
Austin in yo speakers
Selling out theatres
And workin on arenas
King of the renaissance
This is not for leisure
I’m the games medicine
Healin amnesia

Abs on swell
Like i’m LL
Cool J detail
Like im Denzel
Definitely raised the scale
And doing well
Im free with bail
Unlock my cell
Live my best life like
Little duval
No snack this a whole meal
Can’t fit in yo lunch pale
Grown so much
Im so mature
No elevator
Ran up the stair well
Love myself first
That’s the best health care
10,000 hrs
Malcolm gladwell
Im king David
Slavin lions and bears
Goliath up next
Respect the heir, to the chair
Listen here, if your hearings impair
Im running with faith
They running scared
Thoughts of despair
But I care
This is more than a career
Its the murder of my fears
So prepare I
Pay homage
Like i got a timebooth
Christopher Wallace said
To hypnotize you
Im big poppa
You juice fruit
Magical mathematics
Calculatin the proof
Im pac with a 2
And some 2 live crew
Im in her pouch
Like a kangaroo
No excuse
Don’t act aloof
Just speak yo truth
The aim is set
Im bout to shoot
Came off the bench
Now im most improved
MVp got some brand new moves
Im Kuzco, MVO,
March's very own
But im rockin my thrown so

CHORUS

Animated lyricst
Shakin off seizures
Murder my brutus
While roaming like Caesar
Chavez,
Shout out mi hombre
Soy de Austin
Since i lost my abuelita
I done got focus
Raise my frequency
And aimed at my purpose

Chorus
I just want to rap my dissertation
Can you feel the rhythm in my education
Edgy with the art
And articulation
This is for slavery
We need reparations
Representation
No no negotiation
System still broken
And its still breakin

Chorus

Young Austin

Started back in High school
And i’m still grindin
Cookin up my craft like crack
All night man
And i got that glow
I know,
I be shinin
I don’t need a beat
My ukulele be vibin

O yea

Im on my grind man
Use to do open mics
And now its flights man
Gotta take a pic
Just to have a time stamp
Post online, rewind, the time spent

My time now,
I aint gotta wait lata
My buzz big,
All summa like cicadas
Still collect cash
4 ways quad papa
That’s my fault
Plus ima, earthquaka
Motivata
Kick push grind like lupe
Mystery uke, and my loops get scooby
Still in grad school, but i write short movies
And made the soundtrack
Cuz that’s, my duty
Yea, its been a minute since they heard me rap
I snap, for all the squad that know me since
I was kinda lost but i had a gift
Now my confidence, blends with discipline
My innocence switch with common sense
Third eye vision, optometrist
The pessimist, had to die in the sky
But it's alright, i learn how to fly
Still peter pan, but my hook is inside
Rebirth, new me, he feels so alive
Clap for the man, Nope,
No suicide,
Shout out to the source,
Of course it provides
This is not a game
So don’t run, don’t hide
This is your guide
On how to survive
From white guys, in neck ties that tell lies
From white guys, in neck ties that tell...

Real soon they gona call me
Dr. Austin
Kill the negativity and
Put it in a coffin
Not a politician
But i can solve the problem
Raise all the pay
And fix public housin

Aint i still got the bars
Aint i still servin god
And i live in Arkansas
Bounce back from every lost
Can’t stand in my paws
Too worried about the law
Short stick is your straw
Your dysfunctional
Your bars get recalled
Chopped down like a log
Chop chop chop chop
Chop,
My mind is enthralled
The crowd is appalled
All homies applause
Aint beat all the odds
Aint i put on the squad
They all got degrees huh
We done wont the rings huh
We champions huh
Use to eat the free lunch
Now we eat what we want huh

Aint i moved on
From the group
Black panther
Without the suit
Im salad and the soup
Brian a mansion without the roof
I got closure
When i learned the truth
Nobody love you like you
So i loved myself
Then i grew
Toxic vibes had to get removed
Young austin
I aint 30 yet
Clean money
No dirty ships
Degrees on me with a scholarship
My rhetoric
Tick tick tick
Like camel lips
I like to spit
Karma flips
So i get the win
My DNA
Sound like eminem
On a vitamin
Fightin Spiderman
This a ukulele
Not a violion
Or a mandolin
So try again
My adrenaline
Be complin
Evidence
That’s heaven sent
Good GOD

Black Bones

I keep it real to bone
Never fold
Like a domino
I keep it real to the bone
Never folkd
Like a domino
Add it up like some dominios
Bones bones bones
Add it up like some dominos
Bones bones bones

The land that we on
Was a slave yard
But we not scared of the graveyard
Cuz all the spirits ancestors
We like to dance on our tombstone
Come dance with us
And well smack bones
And well add it all up
Like a skeleton
All the melanin
That we swimmin on
Got us spinnin
Like spinners
So add it up

Chorus

Halo

Sleep sweet angel
Sleep in heaven

Good night angel
Don’t forget your halo
When you go back through
Those golden gates

Eww i love your wings
When you fly, high, I, Say

Repeat

Fantasies
On a cloud
And when it rains
I hope you never go down

HAIKUS

Hoarse vocal warm ups
Are like an untuned guitar
Know your instrument

Easy freewriting
But a real writer know that
Editing is WORK

Get out of your head
Isolation can cause death
Allow perspective

I use to freestyle
In ciphers with good rappers
Now I'm with actors

I hate when you leave
5hrs away makes me miss you
I should call more

Creativity
Is often misunderstood
But some understand

Grad school Fayetteville
Avatar bending Ozarks
Master razorback

When you leave we fight
Insecurities kill trust
Please don't leave me here

Words are limited
It's hard describing feelings
But so is silence

Doubt is absent faith
Lack of trust to operate
Trust the opposite

Grey space between
That's when you are over revenge
But can understand

Trying to lose weight
Then stop neglecting the gym
And no fried chicken

Collaboration
Sharing process with people
Be selfless today

Waiting at bus stop
Awkward stares from silent eyes
Thank you for headphones

Living in passion
Can be dying in pockets
Therefore have vision

My ukulele
Can weep like a willow tree
Emotional strings

I want to fart now
Toxic gas fills my stomach
Beware of warfare

Speak on your impulse
Vocalize your initial thought
Why hesitate guts

Lessons of music
are like life, practice art slow
Fundamentals work

Blind leading blind
Honest never lead honest
Lies covering lies

Green rooms reveal truth
Costumes can hide character
But we need a show

Rush to auditions
Waiting for callbacks
Actors all want to get cast

Bread sugar and pork
I must cut them from my meals
But I hate diets

Classical and jazz
Like I was Nina Simone
Black woman goddess

T.V. golden age
Premium channel streaming
I want 10 seasons

New one person show
I want to make them specials
That sold out Broadway

Tony's & Emmys
Oscars and Grammys notice
People like awards

Professional plays
Hopefully don't cost much
Thank God for Netflix

Legal cannabis
Decriminalize ganja
Congressmen smoke it
BAR 4 BAR — THTR-4063 001 (3 Credits)

Introduction to Hip Hop Theatre: Writing and Performance Workshop

Instructor: Austin Ashford
Contact: adashfor@email.uark.edu
Office: KIMP 406

Class Time: Mon/Weds/Fri. 11:50-12:40pm
Classroom: KIMP 204B
Office Hrs: Thurs. 10-11am (or appointment)

OVERVIEW & LEARNING OUTCOMES:
This Hip Hop Theatre workshop is designed for students interested in exploring Hip Hop Theatre as a means of personal and collective expression through verse-based theatre.

What is Verse-based Theatre? What constitutes Hip Hop theatre? How does one create Hip Hop Theatre to engage and hold an audience? How is verse-based theatre used differently in dialogue, ensemble, and solo work? Using these questions as our guide, this course invites student playwrights and actors to refine and expand their understanding of Hip Hop and Hip Hop theatre and to recognize the power of these art forms to amplify needed messages of personal and societal significance. From that starting point, playwrights and actors will be asked to create individual pieces that explore areas of poetry, rhyme, and emotional consequence while developing and expanding their theatrical, storytelling impulses.

EVALUATION CRITERIA:
- History
- Elements of verse based theatre (rhythm, poetic language, stanchion/meter, etc)
- Critique
- Did students understand vocabulary; the terms taught during workshop. Written and oral expressions demonstrate understanding of specialized vocabulary of the form
- Analysis of literature. Written responses are focused, concise and well organized
- Group process and projects reflect productive collaboration/individual contribution to group project, and led to timely and successful completion of the project. The final performance will have a rubric given to you during the semester.

METHOD:
Students will read and write a number of poems, verses, short scenes and exercises in a multitude of hip-hop/theatrical styles as they work towards the completion of a longer piece. There will be weekly, required writing exercises in the first half of the class—focusing on writing verses, poetry, short pieces, fragments, and monologues. In the second half of the course, we will focus on the writing of solo, duet, and the Final class project Ensemble piece (to be approved). Each student will have the opportunity to have an extended portion of their individual, duet, and ensemble project workshopped in class.

Throughout the course, students own creative work will be supplemented and enhanced with readings and discussions of contemporary hip hop artistry. While we will explore the work of several hip hop artists the focus of the course will remain firmly rooted in practice and on the creation of the student’s own work.

This course is a workshop/discussion course, not a lecture class. Therefore, you must attend
each class to participate in discussions, critical response, group activities, and in-class writing.

**PROCESS:**
Throughout the course we will explore dramtic structure through:

*Reading*
We will read, discuss, and refer to songs, poems, videos, scenes and plays from a variety of (mostly) contemporary playwrights. The purpose of these readings will be to investigate and enhance our understanding of how a play and verse based theatre function. Students will be expected to read and be prepared to participate in discussions relating to the handouts I will provide throughout the semester. I will invite students to lead the reading discussions--to be “Discussion Divas”

*Seeing and Reflecting*
The class will be required to view IslanT (rap) on video. Other video will be given throughout the semester. Once the technological fluency of the class is determined, we will decide how to best distribute and access the video content.

*In-Class and Take-Home Writing Exercises*
During the first half of the semester, The ensemble of creators will play with language and verse by working on weekly exercises that will challenge the writer to work on a number of different verses, poems, monologues and scenes to explore content and experiment with craft. Some of these pieces may be fragments or just thoughts that can be developed later into the semester.
The prompts are intended as exercises, but material discovered in them often serves as an initiating point for the larger projects. You will be expected to share writing assignments for the class on Mon/Weds and be prepared to record your piece via video on Fridays.

*Playwriting*
In the second half of the semester, students will work on individual, duet, and ensemble projects and workshop them in class. We will be performing the work that we write in this workshop and giving constructive critiques on how the piece can better evolve as a Hip Hop theatre piece. Each individual project must be approved with me and should be a complete draft of a piece.

**FUNDAMENTALS**
This course includes appropriate physical contact between theatre artists, a fundamental aspect of our discipline. Such touch may occur during warm ups, acting exercises, improvisational exercises, costume fittings, and/or scene work between students and/or teachers while learning. In addition,
at times the course may require you to engage in strenuous physical activities and exercises, necessitating your full commitment. You will not be able to meet the requirements of the course if you are unwilling to engage with and progress in these physical exercises. Accommodations can and will be made for physical limitations with documentation. This course will also likely contain the performing, sharing or discussion of content that may be uncomfortable for some individuals, and may, without warning, trigger emotional responses - this is the nature of live theatre - and every attempt will be made to deal with this in a respectful and careful manner but will not be avoided or shied away from. The full spectrum of life experience is the material from which theatre is made. By remaining enrolled in this class past the add/drop period, you acknowledge that you've read and understand this statement and are willing to participate in the normal and appropriate physical contact occurring within the boundaries of the theatrical discipline.

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:**

1. **Attendance and Class Participation (20%)**
   We will work together in this class—responding to and critiquing each other’s work in supportive and nurturing critical response discussions. We will also do a number of in-class writing assignments. Participation in discussions and in-class writing assignments is—simply—vital to your grade.

2. **Response Paper, Readings, and Discussion Divas (20%)**
   There will be several written response papers covering a hip hop film, Bars Mixtape Musical vol 1 and 2, Rapping Deconstructed The best rappers of all time, how the Triplet flow took over rap, Button Poetry, RAPTURE (Netflix), Love Beats Rhyme (Netflix) and Chiraq (Unknown), The Get Down (Netflix), Hip Hop Evolution (Netflix), and maybe a few more. Titles of the videos and specific guidelines for each assignment will be given in class. For the additional readings, students will be asked to be Lead discussion further information on this will be given in class.

3. **Weekly Exercises: (10%) Writing prompt assignment and presentation of writing assignment in class, and/or response to piece/video.**
   In the first half of the course, weekly writing exercises will be given. **Expect to write at least a verse/2 stanzas a week.** These exercises must be typed and will be due every Monday or Wednesday. An exact schedule will be determined in class.

4. **Projects (50%) - Solo - 15%, Duo - 15%, Ensemble 20%**
   You will have 3 major projects that make up half of your grade. The first is a solo Triptick piece that must be 4 mins long. The second will be a Duet piece in the shape of a rap battle against your partner. And the third will be a class ensemble piece. Each piece will also be recorded and watched in class with notes and critiques. The written text of all three projects is required in play format.

**EVALUATION/GRADING PROCEDURE:**

Grading will be based on the following components:

- Responding and engaging openly with fellow writers in critical response sessions: 20%
- Participating in discussions and in-class readings: 30%
- I cannot over-emphasize the role genuine participation and engagement with other students will play in your grade. For introverts and extroverts alike using your voice and participating fully in the class is a critical part of the learning process. Taken together, this is half your grade
- Your Creative work--the weekly exercises and the final project: 50%
Your commitment to the class and the work of the others, and the personal investment taken in the creation of your work will factor in enormously, as will your ability to absorb critical feedback and incorporate that feedback in your work. Take risks, try something new, work assiduously, participate sincerely, and you will succeed in the class.

*Note: Late assignments will be marked accordingly and will adversely impact your grade. I will not ask you to turn in a late assignment. It is incumbent on you to get it to me.*

If you have questions about your standing, make an appointment to discuss it. I will also schedule an appointment with each member of the class during the semester.

**SCHEDULE:**
Broadly, during the first half of the course: Students will receive a weekly creative writing assignment, and readings for discussion. Second half of the course: Students will develop and refine final projects. A more detailed schedule with assignments will be determined once the pace and rhythm of the class is discovered.

**ATTENDANCE:**

*Attendance:*
I will allow 2 unexcused absences and 2 excused absences for the semester.

Excused absences include 1) religious holidays, 2) illness, 3) serious illness or death of a member or other family crisis, 4) University-sponsored activities for which the student's attendance is required by virtue of scholarship or leadership/participation responsibilities, 5) jury duty or subpoena for court appearance, 6) military duty, 7) and maybe jail. Students must provide appropriate documentation for any absence for which the student wishes to be excused.

I understand, these are at times unavoidable, but you must contact me before class, with a reason for your absence. Further, you are expected to make up/catch up on whatever you missed in class and email me any assignment that is due.

*After four absences (excused or unexcused) your grade will begin to deteriorate, six or more absences will jeopardize your chances of passing the class.*

*Tardiness:*
Don’t be late, you'll miss a lot and not be prepared. If you are habitually late, it will adversely affect your grade and negatively impact the class dynamic.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY**
As a core part of its mission, the University of Arkansas provides students with the opportunity to
further their educational goals through programs of study and research in an environment that promotes freedom of inquiry and academic responsibility. Accomplishing this mission is only possible when intellectual honesty and individual integrity prevail.

Each University of Arkansas student is required to be familiar with and abide by the University's 'Academic Integrity Policy' which may be found at honesty.uark.edu/policy. Students with questions about how these policies apply to a particular course or assignment should immediately contact me.

**DISABILITY RELATED ACCOMMODATION**

University of Arkansas Academic Policy Series 1520.10 requires that students with disabilities are provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact me privately at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through the Center for Educational Access (contact 479–575–3104 or visit http://cea.uark.edu for more information on registration procedures).

http://cea.uark.edu/faculty/syllabus-statement.php

**EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

Many types of emergencies can occur on campus; instructions for specific emergencies such as severe weather, active shooter, or fire can be found at emergency.uark.edu.

**Severe Weather (Tornado Warning):**

- Follow the directions of the instructor or emergency personnel
- Seek shelter in the basement or interior room or hallway on the lowest floor, putting as many walls as possible between you and the outside
- If you are in a multi-story building, and you cannot get to the lowest floor, pick a hallway in the center of the building
- Stay in the center of the room, away from exterior walls, windows, and doors

**Violence / Active Shooter (CADD):**

- **CALL:** 9-1-1
- **AVOID** - If possible, self-evacuate to a safe area outside the building. Follow directions of police officers.
- **DENY** - Barricade the door with desk, chairs, bookcases or any items. Move to a place inside the room where you are not visible. Turn off the lights and remain quiet. Remain there until told by police it is safe.
- **DEFEND** - Use chairs, desks, cell phones or whatever is immediately available to distract and/or defend yourself and others from attack.
RazALERT
The University of Arkansas has a campus-wide alert system for any hazardous conditions that may arise on campus. To learn more and to sign up:
http://emergency.uark.edu/emergency-notification-system/index.php

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT
A complete list and brief description of academic support programs can be found on the University’s Academic Support site, along with links to the specific services, hours, and locations. I am happy to assist students with finding and using the support services that will help them be successful. http://www.uark.edu/academics/academic-support.php

Center for Learning and Student Success Class
Need help studying? Take advantage of the center's academic tutoring and frequent workshops that tackle common student skills like note taking, reading, study habits, test anxiety and time management. CLASS offers academic coaching, writing support, supplemental instruction, instructional workshops, and one on one tutoring. Call 479-575-2885, Email elc@uark.edu, 040B Gregson Hall.

Writing Center
Need help with your writing skills? Schedule a free online or in-person appointment. Call 479-575-6747 or email writcent@uark.edu. 315 Kimpel Hall.

Center for Education Access
Need a note taker or extra time for tests? CEA helps student with different abilities get the help they need. See if you qualify. Call 479-575-3104 or email ada@uark.edu. 209 Arkansas Union.

Counseling and Psychological Services
Need to talk to a counselor? Call 479-575-5276 to make an appointment. 24 hour emergency service available.

Librarian
Need help with research? Librarians love to help with your research questions. Text: 479-385-0803, Call: 479-575-6645 or email refer@uark.edu

# # #
PHOTO DOCUMENTATION

Performances, Awards, and Festivals Attended

All of these photographs were either taken by the author or members of the University of Arkansas Theatre Department from 2016-2019.

Austin Dean Ashford before his TedTalk in Fayetteville
Island Trap
THE EPIC REMIXOLOGY OF THE ODYSSEY
WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY AUSTIN DEAN ASHFORD
THURSDAY, JUNE 21st  6P
SATURDAY, JUNE 23rd  730P
SUNDAY, JUNE 24th  9P
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27th  6P
SATURDAY, JUNE 30th  4P
DIRECED BY COLE WIMPEE
$10
SINGLE SHOW TIX
MULTI-SHOW PASSES AVAIL.
THE BRISTOL HOTEL THEATRE
1055 1ST AVE.,
SAN DIEGO, CA
92101
TICKETS: HTTPS://SDFRINGE.TICKETLEAP.COM
THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
THE AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM PRESENTS...

A NEW PLAY

BLACK BOOK

WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY:
AUSTIN DEAN ASHFORD

DIRECTED BY DEXTER SINGLETON

11/13 DOORS OPEN AT 7 PM, SHOW STARTS AT 7:30 PM
11/14 DOORS OPEN AT 12 PM, SHOW STARTS AT 12:30 PM
UNIVERSITY THEATER - 340 N GARLAND AVE
FAYETTEVILLE, AR 72701
FREE ADMISSION
SHOW IS APPRX 80 MIN
TINYURL.COM/BLACK-BOOK-RSVP
BlacKting Production Related Photos
Festival Photos
(1)SLAND T(RAP)
by Austin Ashford

Join Austin Ashford on this reverse, one-person Odyssey. Black Ulysses sets off on a mythic voyage from his own island to discover his true artistic home—where his raps can effortlessly flow. With the aid of a wise old...
THE VISIONAIRI FOUNDATION PRESENTS

FEB 21
6:30P

IT'S BLACK
IT'S LIT

BLACK ENTERPRISE EDITION

JANELLE Y. HEMBREE ALUMNI HOUSE
491 N. RAZORBACK RD, FAYETTEVILLE, AR

AYEEE
IT'S A PARTY
BACK HERE!

GUEST PANELISTS INCLUDE

DR. CAREE BANTON · MR. JOEY DANIELS · YVONNE WEMA
DR. TODD JENKINS · MS. TAEGAN LOVELACE

HOSTED BY
AUSTIN DEAN ASHFORD

DJ NICKHUD

CHOREOGRAPHED BY
YVANCE CHOROGRAPHY