Appropriating Realism to Promote Inclusion: Directing Appropriate at University of Portland

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Appropriating Realism to Promote Inclusion:

Directing *Appropriate* at University of Portland

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1. Introduction

I selected the play *Appropriate*, by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, as my thesis production in order to challenge myself with a language-heavy show in opposition to my background in choreography. I wanted to hone my skills at communicating with actors around intentions to evoke playable actions. I knew that *Appropriate*’s success would depend on compelling actor performances within a mostly realistic style (see “Style/Script Analysis/Approach”).

In addition to shows with music and movement, I am drawn to contemporary and new works for the theater, especially those that portray unsavory characters in edgy situations involving crime or desperate circumstances. The Lafayette family in *Appropriate* are an unsavory lot, but they wear the trappings of a respectable, upper middle class American family. Their desperation converges around a crime that our country’s justice, educational and financial systems has been committing against African Americans since slavery: systemic racism. *Appropriate* delighted me with its contradictions of humor and horror when a white Southern family discovers racist artifacts in their late father’s belongings. Stylistically, the play presents what seems to be a classic family drama in the tradition of Eugene O’Neill, Edward Albee, or Arthur Miller, but in actuality reflects a postmodern sensibility—postmodern here meaning that there is no one absolute truth—that leaves the late patriarch’s perspective undefined and the audience wondering what the fate of the characters will be. The play also uses a number of expressionistic/poetic gestures which increase the theatricality of the show and defy the realistic drama genre.

During the play selection process, I was working on a research project at a public university in which students had attempted to devise a show on the root causes of systemic
racism in our country and police violence against people of color. In the process, I surveyed and interviewed a group of largely white students at a predominantly white institution (PWI) who confronted their unconscious biases and white privilege in attempting to create theater that would enlighten others on these topics. Unfortunately, the devised material was abandoned and ensemble trust destroyed when the group could not agree on equitable, inclusive ways to tell these stories, and a person of color (POC) left the ensemble when she felt disrespected by some of its white members. In studying these students, I saw how much work there is to be done in race relations on college campuses. The University of Portland demographics are strikingly similar to those at the research site, although our population has even fewer people of color.

I discovered Jacobs-Jenkins as the author of *An Octoroon*, which had been selected for the upcoming season at a local theater. Investigating the varied work of the young playwright, I was drawn to *Appropriate* out of his body of work because I loved the challenge of taking on that staple of American theater, the family drama.

This brief synopsis of *Appropriate* serves to introduce each of the characters referred to throughout this document. When Ray, the father of siblings Toni, Bo and Franz dies, the three urbanites converge on the family's plantation home in southeast Arkansas to organize an estate sale and auction the house. Franz has been out of contact with the family for a decade, but at the urging of his girlfriend, River, is on a mission to make amends with his family. Old wounds around Toni's attempts to take care of Franz throughout years of addiction are opened, while Bo tries ineffectually to mediate the unanticipated reunion. As the family cleans the house, racist artifacts potentially belonging to their father are unearthed, including an album of historical lynching photos. Bo's wife Rachael shares with the siblings what she interpreted as Ray's racist
behavior towards her; they react with denial, violence, and helplessness.

The question of profiting from the photo album is raised by Cassidy, Bo and Rachael's daughter, and the notion flies through the family like wildfire. However, Cassidy's main concern is crushing on her cousin Rhys, who is dealing with crippling anger and shame after selling drugs at school which resulted in the death of a fellow student and the firing of his mother, Toni. Ainsley, who is Bo and Rachael's youngest child, amplifies Rachael's irritation and desire to protect her children from harm. Tensions boil to a head when Toni announces to the family that she has cancelled the estate sale, seemingly out of spite. Franz interrupts this revelation with the news that he has symbolically cleansed the family of its connection to slavery by destroying the photo album, estimated by Bo to be worth $750,000 or more. River, Rachael and Toni butt heads on Franz's behavior, and Toni reveals to River that Franz left the family after impregnating a 12-year-old. A physical fight then erupts which involves the entire family. In its wake, Franz attempts to rescue the photo album, and Toni realizes that she never knew how to love Franz. Bo collapses under the weight of the situation and the play ends with a time-lapsed portraying the destruction of the house, ending with a building inspector evaluating it years in the future.

As I eagerly read the script, I uncovered many personal connections to the content of the play. I had lost a parent mere months before starting graduate school, and like the Lafayettes, had the experience of cleaning out a house that held decades of family detritus. Addiction and mental illness run through my family history as they do in *Appropriate*. Most compellingly, I found myself identifying with the least sympathetic character in the show. I recognized Toni’s actions in myself from when I became a caregiver for my mother in the year before her death. Her hardened exterior and bossy, “go mode” attitude was a defense mechanism I had taken on myself.
to avoid the pain of watching a loved one disappear.

I found *Appropriate* well suited for the University of Portland because it comments specifically on whiteness, but my discovery happened to coincide with the swiftly changing political climate following Barack Obama’s final term as President of the United States. I put *Appropriate* on my shortlist for thesis production possibilities in November 2016, days before the election. When the decision to produce *Appropriate* was finalized in the spring, President Donald Trump was sending shockwaves through the news cycle on a daily basis, and the need to do this show seemed even more urgent than when I’d first read it. Never in my wildest nightmares did I imagine that days before auditions, white supremacist protestors would commit violence against counter-protestors in Charlottesville, Virginia, resulting in the death of a young woman. The play was no longer just compelling. It was necessary.

Along with my professional goals for myself in choosing the piece, it was important to me that we incorporate as many voices of color on the design and production team as possible. By May 2017, I met with the beginnings of the *Appropriate* team—assistant director Elijah Fisher, who identifies as a black male; dramaturg Kalā Mueller, who identifies as a Hawaiian-Swiss male; scenic designer Megan Macker, who identifies as a white female; and costume designer AngelMarie Summers, who identifies as a Mexican female. We identified our main goal to have the (majority) white members of our audiences walk away considering their own complicity in allowing or benefitting from racist systems in our society. We hoped that rather than walking away thinking “That’s not me,” each person would consider how she ignores, dismisses or distances herself from evidence of racism going on in front of her. We wanted people to question where, in their own lives, they were tolerating racism and where they could take action to bring
about change. We discussed how the audience would leave not knowing if Ray, the story's late patriarch, was racist, and carry that question into their own lives and interactions. As they watched the house collapse over time, they might wonder how long institutionalized racism will go on before it is toppled. In my preproduction writing, my major goal for my cast was to inspire “reckless play and relentless invention…to earn breakthroughs they didn’t think were possible” (Wallenfels, “Thesis Preproduction”). With designers, my aim was to create a complete and realistic world that the actors and audience could buy into, one that brings to life the presence and character of the house and its transformations.

Themes that emerged throughout the process of directing *Appropriate* fall into three major categories: the relationship between outreach-based or “extracurricular” learning activities and their effect on the participants’ work on the show, leadership and expectations, and finally, directing realism on a proscenium stage. In the first category, I will explore questions of how we explored historical and contemporary effects of racism as a production team, and used the university, greater Portland, and ourselves as the research site in order to gain a better understanding of the issues the playwright brings to light in this piece. Looking deeply at the white privilege of many *Appropriate* participants, while including the viewpoints of people of color involved in the production, was impactful and increased participants’ commitment level.

I come away from the production wondering how I could have better leveraged these at times disconcerting learning events toward a more integrated, holistic trajectory of responsible citizenship. Learnings culled from the theme of leadership and expectations center around the contrasting experiences of the actors in contrast to a few design and production staff. Actors felt empowered and supported to create what for many marked a breakthrough in their acting
training. Yet I faced a challenge in creating the conditions for design and production people to execute their roles successfully and sustainably. At times my frustration with these areas of production hurt my working relationships with students. Misaligned or unrealistic expectations between myself and my design and production staff came up a number of times in post-production responses, surfacing the question of how to set and agree on a vision of a show that is also realistic for participants. I question how could I have caught this misalignment as it was happening and readjusted expectations on both sides of the issue to create a smooth workflow, instead of having student collaborators carrying hurt feelings through the ending of the experience.

Finally, emergent themes around size, staging and pace refer to my learning trajectory in grasping the grammar of directing realism on a proscenium stage. Because my primary goal in working with the actors was to stretch them beyond their comfort zones, I lost sight of attending to authentic listening and responding. I did not tend to making the actors build moments together in forming the shape of a scene as it rose in tension, but rather pushed for a heightened and extreme state. I now reflect that it is important to hold both values throughout the process. My approach to pace may have suffered by leaving it to the end, when authenticity was already compromised. The optimal pace of act two was never discovered reliably. A question I come away with is finding the right time to build in tempo as a directorial layer. Learning the grammar of staging realism in the proscenium configuration with undergraduate students was a journey from the pursuit of “organic intentions” to the implementation of calculated, sometimes contrived solutions, to point the actors and their language downstage.

As I look back at how we handled the difficult content of the show, I can see how the
learning events augmenting the rehearsal process contributed to a courageous commitment to our process. *Appropriate* also provided plenty of opportunities for me to work on areas that are less familiar to me as a director in terms of using dense language and working within the world of a realistic living room play, while engaging my passion and sense of purpose through the play’s underlying appeal to social justice. I was surprised to learn how much I had to learn along the way about staging techniques I thought were straightforward, and even more surprised to begin to find a subtle use of the compositional tools I rely on as a choreographer, as discussed in “Auditions/Casting/Rehearsal.” In the final analysis, the courageous commitment by our cast was the single most impactful contributing factor in creating the strength of the show.
2. Research

In determining the scope of research for *Appropriate*, my first priority was gaining a historical “backstory” for the house and its connection to the conditions that created the lynching artifacts found inside. Obtaining this knowledge would help create the given circumstances of the show for student actors, some of whom would have no connection to the American South. Moreover, it was important for Kalā, the dramaturg, and for me, since neither of us is African American, to revisit our nation’s tumultuous history of racial injustice. I felt strongly that making this history immediate for our all-white cast, and ultimately our audiences, was part of the education that Jacobs-Jenkins intends. Further, I needed them as people to have more sensitivity to historical atrocities than their characters do, in order for them to portray the characters’ ignorance.

Intrigued by Franz's statement that the house had been in the Lafayette family for five generations, I tried to determine in what year and historical era it had first been acquired. Because Bo remembers “Grandma’s endless stories about some great-great-great cousin Bubba hiding sacks of flour from the Yankees,” it stands to reason the family did own the house during the Civil War, fought from 1861 to 1865 (all quotes from *Appropriate* contained in this document are from the Adobe Digital Edition published by Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 2016). If Ray was the fifth generation and he was in his early 70s in 2017, when we set the play, then he might have been born around 1944. Counting a generation as 25 years and subtracting 125 years from Ray’s birth year took us back to 1819. This year of “birth” for the house links Antebellum architecture with the wave of European immigration after Napoleon’s defeat in the war of 1812. Further, Jacobs-Jenkins seems to be suggesting the Lafayettes are of French descent, given the siblings full names of Antoinette, Beauregard, and Francois. Deciding the family had been in
residence since 1819 speaks to a lineage of wealth and power that only white people have enjoyed in this country, while seeding the ground for ghostly ancestral presence in the house.

Analyzing the South’s plantation economy and how it functioned as an institutionalized system of oppression from the founding of the country through the Reconstruction era was the next task. In *The Roots of Black Poverty*, Jay Mandle examines plantations in economic terms. Mandle illuminates how the budding nation’s free market economy was corrupted, giving rise to America’s plantation economy as an agricultural system defined as one in which:

> the state of technology allows profit-maximizing, large-scale farmers to produce a staple primarily for an external market. That same technology, however, requires the use of more workers than profitably low wage rates would attract. As a result some nonmarket mechanism is required in order for the planters to be sure of a sufficient supply of workers to carry out profitable production. In turn, those nonmarket mechanisms help to define the class relations of the society. The culture which emerges reinforces these class relations (10).

In economic terms, slaves were the “nonmarket mechanism” — the unpaid labor that allowed planters to profit from large scale operations, rather than attracting willing employees with desirable wages that would have reduced the planters’ profit margin. In order to acquire a nonmarket, or artificial, labor mechanism in a free market society, white planters subjugated the slave-objects by asserting dominance over them, which had lasting societal repercussions. This switched a chicken-and-egg assumption in my mind: did white people’s supposed intellectual and moral superiority over POCs create the conditions of American society, or were our nation’s founders merely looking to justify their economic ends by using the societal conditions at their disposal? The definition of a plantation as a system was not a business model in which the lower classes of society were used in their “proper” place, but a cult of intimidation that created unfair economic gain for those who could maintain dominance. Mandle continues, “plantations are best defined not in terms of territory or even in terms of agricultural production, but in terms of the
authority of the planter; where the authority of the planter ended so too did the plantation as a viable institution” (13). Looking at this definition of plantations as an economic loophole for white planters to make money at the cost of human rights casts an incriminating light on Bo’s perhaps innocent impulse to profit from lynching photos. Should the siblings as inheritors of power be allowed to profit on others’ suffering? James Thomas's system of script analysis (detailed below) and his idea of the “seed word” began to emerge for me as “self-interest.”

In further seeking to define what plantations are, I turned to investigating their environment. The crop(s) grown on a thriving Layfayette plantation might have been cotton, corn, or tobacco due to its location in Southeast Arkansas. Yet in Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery, John Vlach states that what distinguished a plantation was its grounds and attention to decorative detail. Indicative of power, “the ideal plantation was a large, tastefully appointed country estate belonging to a prominent gentleman” (5). Vlatch describes that the plantation’s signature was carefully manicured gardens and architecture that featured symmetry, straight lines and right angles to show off a “strict, hierarchical order” and a “strong sense of the planter’s dominance over both nature and society” (5). Aesthetic expression of this dominance manifested as “mathematical precision being considered as a proof of individual superiority” (5). Considering the legacy of inequity that had essentially birthed its own art movement through architecture and landscaping was another view of how entrenched racism is in our society as we approached the play.

Kalā and I then used the State of Arkansas as an anchor point from which to review the timeline of American history with contemporary eyes toward the historical inequity our country is built on, personalizing the information where possible. Arkansas entered the Union in 1836 as
a slave state, offsetting the entry of Maine, a free state. During American expansion, Arkansas was thought to be “plains” or “frontier” in contrast to the more genteel “Deep South.” The Layfayettes would have been seen as “backwoods.” At the height of slavery in 1860, the majority of Southern slaveholders owned between 20 and 30 slaves, so the Lafayettes might have had up to 30 people tending the house and property. Arkansas departed the Union in 1861, along with ten other Southern states, due to the abolition of slavery through the 13th Amendment.

During the Civil War, when the Southern economy tanked, it is possible the Lafayettes fled the house to stay with relatives outside the battleground of the Civil War (after hiding their sacks of four from Yankee soldiers invading and ransacking their home). The Emancipation Proclamation of 1862 declared blacks in rebelling states free, and the Militia Act allowed blacks living in slavery to fight for the Union; a few of the bondsmen and women on the Lafayette plantation may have escaped at that time. After Lincoln is shot in 1865, vice president Andrew Johnson inherits the presidency and Black Codes are enacted, restricting and regulating African American living areas, work habits and freedom of movement. Although the South endured a military occupation after the Civil War, Andrew Johnson’s government was lenient to Southern states’ reliance on slavery, and contempt for black people continued. Slaves may have continued to be used at the Layfayette homestead, but plantations were losing their labor forces to sharecropping, which allowed blacks to receive a share of the value of the crop they cultivated, minus charges and the materials and living arrangements they received on credit. In 1868, the 14th Amendment stated that all people born in America are citizens with accordant rights, including the right to vote for African Americans. Waves of mob lynchings swept the South, providing early models for what would later become the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). During the
Reconstruction Era (1865 to 1877), each slow step toward establishing racial justice was met with a countermeasure of hatred. The 15th Amendment explicitly gave African-Americans the right to vote but the literacy and citizenship tests given to black people were used to prevent them from voting. The increasing power of the KKK and grassroots lynchings were consistently ignored, and in 1899, “Jim Crow” laws placed further restrictions on African Americans as the Black Codes had done 35 years before, undoing the work of the last two amendments.

Lynchings were especially prevalent between 1881 and 1901, a period estimated to have seen 100 lynchings per year. Ida B. Wells Barnett exposed the corruption behind these lynchings as an investigative reporter for New York Age and published her controversial findings. While lynching events often hinged on claims of black people breaking a minor law, stealing, or disrespecting a white person, Wells-Barnett found that these mob mentality-fueled murders usually masked consensual sex between blacks and whites, or white women pursuing black men. Law enforcement often looked the other way as angry crowds broke the doors down of local jails where the accused was being held, kidnapping the man or woman and hanging them from a tree. Such events were considered local celebrations, as described in “The Black Body as Souvenir in American Lynching” by Harvey Young. Burned flesh and body parts were considered souvenirs of such events and photography, a lesser class of souvenir. Photos were traded, sold and used as postcards sent through the US Mail to family members to commemorate the event. These photographs were collected or sent to family as a postcard, with a few jotted lines such as “This is the Barbecue we had last night, My picture is to the left with a cross over it, Your son” (also quoted in Young 645). Young writes that “lynching campaigns—and, more importantly, the crowd’s participation as witnesses, in the execution of those campaigns—were significant events
in the participants’ lives” (645).

Given the location of the Lafayette plantation geographically and historically, it is highly likely that earlier generations of family members at least witnessed, if not participated in, one or more mob lynching during the period between 1840-1910. Jacobs-Jenkins’ themes of family can be directly related to the observations of sociologist Orlando Patterson, whose book *Rituals of Blood* contends that:

> It takes little imagination to understand now, how the powerful—and for the children who were forced to watch, no doubt traumatic—experience of watching the torture, mutilation, and the burning alive of the African-American victim would have become encoded forever, through the overwhelming odor of his roasting body, on the memories of all who participated (Patterson quoted in Young 644).

It is possible that Ray’s parents or grandparents took or collected the photographs in the album his children discover, but it is also possible Ray gained possession of the photo album as contemporary curator James Allen did. Allen was a white man who assembled a much-discussed collection of lynching photos and had them displayed at a New York City art gallery in 2000 under the title *Without Sanctuary,*¹ which also spawned a permanent online exhibition and a Senate apology. In the introduction, writer Hilton Als, who Jacobs-Jenkins would later work with at *The New Yorker* magazine, uses inflammatory language to disparage a public that would excuse itself of a thirst for the horrible thrill of the photos with an introduction written by a black man. Als argues the photos are taken from the vantage point of the non-endangered victors, and therefore perpetuate the same violence depicted within them.

Other black scholars offer a counternarrative. Koritha Mitchell’s *Living with Lynching* is a collection of one-act dramas written by African-Americans between 1890-1930, showcasing the cultural production and defiant survival of a group of people under attack. Mitchell issues a challenge to readers “to recognize that black art about lynching does not simply respond to
violent injustice; it continues affirming discourses in African America—established discourses that the mob felt compelled to answer” (Mitchell 8).

Writer Susan Sontag wrote of the *Without Sanctuary* exhibit: “What is the point of exhibiting these pictures? To awaken indignation? To make us feel ‘bad’; that is, to appall and sadden? To help us mourn?” (91). Jacobs-Jenkins must feel there is some value in exhibiting these pictures, because he continues to expose audiences to lynching photos. His play *An Octoroon* calls for a huge projection of one (40), and he cites Sontag’s work *Regarding the Pain of Others*, from which the above quote is taken, in the epigraph for *Appropriate*.

Kalā and I discussed other thematic threads and sociological phenomena contained in *Appropriate*, most importantly the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Information on AA helped our actors understand the ritual aspect of making amends, often involving a journey and/or a statement to family members, which is part of a codified recovery process in that program. Pedophiles, as another stigmatized group, have a much harder time finding support. We investigated a first person account of a pedophile who, when denied mental health support by the practitioners he came in contact with, started his own online community for other pedophiles in recovery. The narrator’s courageous and credible account of trying to rise above his “urges” as Franz calls them (43) gave us a “teaching story” to be able to discuss an uncomfortable subject as Brandon embarked on trying to make this real for himself.

2.1 Playwright research

“I ended up deciding I would steal something from every play that I liked,” Jacobs-Jenkins told *The New York Times* reviewer Ben Brantley in a 2014 *Appropriate* review, “and put those things in a play and cook the pot to see what happens.” Jacobs-Jenkins catches himself red
handed, of course, pointing out both adjective and verb forms of the word in a preface to the play: “to take without permission or consent; seize; expropriate” (Appropriate 5). He told Eliza Bent of American Theatre that he pronounces the title as an adjective, though it can be taken both ways. “I’m interested in how something can look the same but mean totally different things. Blah blah blah. Language.” (Bent).

Jacobs-Jenkins attended Princeton University, where he studied fiction writing and obtained a degree in anthropology. When a fiction writing professor questioned Jacobs-Jenkins on the race of his characters when it wasn’t named, Jacobs-Jenkins was gobsmacked by the double standard. He began to write plays and to investigate “how blackness on stage works” (Bent). “I don’t know what anyone is talking about when they talk about black theatre, black drama, black actors. I don’t know. No one walks around saying white theatre or white actors” (Bent). He went on to obtain a graduate degree in performance studies at New York University and began creating performance art solos in downtown New York City venues before drifting toward playwriting. He wrote his first well-known play, Neighbors, during a residency for emerging writers at New York Theatre Workshop, and later had it produced at the Public Theater.

Jacobs-Jenkins calls himself best known for plays that use “‘blackness’ as a material” (Brantley). Appropriate has become part of an informal trilogy of plays that includes An Octoroon (2014), which in combination with Appropriate won him an Obie Award in 2014. In An Octoroon, he adapts a nineteenth-century melodrama by Irish writer Dion Boucicault, which portrays how the nephew of a slaveowner falls in love with one of the women who works on his late uncle’s estate. Both An Octoroon and his first play, Neighbors (2010), call for actors
in blackface. In *Neighbors*, the playwright’s first exploration of minstrelsy, a black family (in blackface) with names such as Mammy, Sambo and Topsy move in next door to a black academic. Jacobs-Jenkins hoped to problematize the definition of blackness through multiple (15, to be specific) representations of it.

Other works do not discuss race so pointedly, but incorporate color conscious casting in different ways. In *Gloria* (2015), the playwright shows us another set of petty, self-involved characters whose primary occupation before a life-altering incident are gossiping, backstabbing, and pretending to work at the magazine where they are all employed (said to to be modeled after Jacobs-Jenkins’ time at *The New Yorker*). The character breakdown in Gloria includes descriptions like “white,” “Chinese-American or Korean-American,” and “anything really” (5). *Everybody* (2017) adapts the medieval morality play *Everyman*; in Jacobs-Jenkins’ version, the role of Everyman is determined by chance every night.

Like the Lafayette family, Jacobs-Jenkins himself was raised in Washington, DC and spent summers in Arkansas with his mother’s parents. The playwright learned about three siblings and his father’s “separate family” at the age of 14, which has caused him to be “obsessed with sibling relationships in my plays” (Witchel). *War* (2016) parallels *Appropriate* in its examination of siblings in crisis. In *War*, a mother suffers a stroke and goes into a coma. The unknown German woman who will not leave her side in the hospital claims to be their mother’s sister. Elfriede is a mystery the siblings must unravel; on the way, ape-like creatures transmit information to the audience by a kind of sign language.

Jacobs-Jenkins’ body of work reveals a promising, prolific, boundary-pushing young writer in his early years of what the theater hopes will be a long career. “I find that when I see one
thing, Branden sees 10 things,” Playwrights Realm literary manager Alex Barron is quoted as saying in American Theatre. “The story of a dysfunctional family in Appropriate is actually about ghosts and class and self-loathing and cicadas and Chekhov and faith and the centuries-old legacy of slavery.” Certainly, history haunts Jacobs-Jenkins’ work, but his undergraduate degree in anthropology is perhaps what allows him to insert its influence into contemporary experience. Framing Appropriate within this body of work helped me identify how themes of race, family, privilege and cruelty transmute through a variety of dramatic situations Jacobs-Jenkins may pick up. War in particular helped me embrace the totemic anger in Toni.

Jacobs-Jenkins is now known as the go-to incendiary playwright of color to speak on race, and that, too, seems in danger of presenting another barrier to understanding his work. The playwright voiced this frustration with a story in an interview:

I just had an encounter with this director I really respect. I was saying, “Why do you want to work with me?” and he said, “Because I’m really interested in talking about race.” It was like: “So do you think that you’ve not been making work about race? You’ve been making work about whiteness.” That’s O.K. Race is always in play, but somehow when I walk into a room, it’s a word that’s used to put me in a corner (Witchel).

Citing oft-backgrounded racial currents in plays like Death of a Salesman and A Streetcar Named Desire, Jacobs-Jenkins adds, “So I’m told that I’m writing about race when I feel I’m actually just telling stories about people in the same way as these writers who are heroes to me” (Witchel). “What really triggered the writing of the play was hearing people describe the great American family drama and what that was,” the playwright told Bent. “I’d look around and be like, ‘There are no people of color on these lists.’ Who has access to this idea of family as a universal theme?” The playwright provided examples:

I think Tracy Letts specially chose to put a Native American in the attic [of August Osage County]. A Streetcar Named Desire is all about interracial marriage between classes, and even Death of a Salesman is all about a Jewish neighborhood...Long Day’s Journey is totally about Irish immigrants trying to buy their
way into a new class—a WASPier social set. I was like, “Why does no one talk about this?” (Bent).

The character of Playwright in An Octaroon complains, “I can’t even wipe my ass without someone trying to accuse me of deconstructing the race problem in America” (9).

2.2 Play research

Appropriate was developed at the 2013 Humana Festival of New American Plays, at Actors Theatre of Louisville, when the playwright was 29 years old. Appropriate was produced at the Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago, Illinois the following year, quickly followed by productions at Washington, DC’s Woolly Mammoth, and Signature Theatre in New York City. Jacobs-Jenkins remarked to Bent that different directors’ interpretations, from Kentucky resident Gary Griffin, to the South African Liesl Tommy, “could not be more different” (Bent).

Part of what drew Jacobs-Jenkins to write a family drama was the same reason I chose to direct one: seeking to understand something I’d formerly disdained. Like him, “I found myself judging these ‘family dramas’ and writing them off because of their conventional storytelling form” (Bent). Jacobs-Jenkins, who believes in the power of form, examined his own bias and wondered why he valued some forms over others. He read every family drama he could get his hands on in an attempt to understand the form that had been handed down by writers of earlier generations: “After a while I realized they are actually all about race or ethnicity or identity. They all are but they never get credited as that” (Bent).

Nationwide productions of Appropriate had been reviewed at the time of my research phase, helping me understand how the play was received by a number of critics. “[Jacobs-Jenkins] appropriates prime examples of America’s dominant dramatic tradition—domestic realism—to see whether a more widespread national truth can be wrung from it,” Charles
McNulty wrote in a review of *Appropriate* for the *Los Angeles Times*. The Southern gothic family’s skeletons in the closet call to mind architects of the American family drama like Arthur Miller, Sam Shepard, and Tracy Letts, and Tennessee Williams. Jacobs-Jenkins adds a generous helping of comedic elements resulting from sibling jabs. In *The New Yorker*, Hilton Als called *Appropriate* “both an homage to and an investigation of writers like Shepard, who drew a map of this country through so many tired living rooms furnished with recrimination and repression.”

The significance of Sontag’s nonfiction treatise *Regarding the Pain of Others* for Jacobs-Jenkins, specifically her writing about privilege, helped me understand it in a broader scope than the racial conflict in America. Sontag takes issue with a society that will drown itself in imagery of war waged on foreign soil, yet distance itself from taking responsibility for the horrors it gorges itself on via newspapers and television every day. In the age of social media, the replication of that imagery has only sped up since her writing. Yet, as Bo says, what is a white person to do about others’ suffering? “If one feels that there is nothing ‘we’ can do—but who is that ‘we’?—and nothing ‘they’ can do either—and who are ‘they’?—then one starts to get bored, cynical, apathetic,” (101) Sontag writes. But when witnessing others’ suffering, is “feeling bad” helpful? “So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering,” Sontag writes (102). She calls sympathy an “inappropriate” response to suffering, urging the reader to set sympathy aside for “a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering” (102). In *Appropriate*, the characters struggle with the remote knowledge that for five centuries, their family’s wealth has meant suffering for others. But the “we” and “they” of this storybook tale of their heritage are remote, and the “bored, cynical, apathetic” response they feel reveals their privilege.
The epigraph for *Appropriate* reads, “No ‘we’ should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people’s pain” (8). To me, Jacobs-Jenkins is saying the same alienation between “we” and “them” applies here at home in America’s race war: Americans cannot be lumped together into one category when we look back at lynching. On another level, Jacobs-Jenkins takes this quote into the domestic households where American drama lives. None of us can ever know “other people’s pain,” even that of your own brother, because each child holds his own version of reality.

The other epigraph is taken from Anton Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard*, which also addresses slavery outside of an American context. Lopakhin is an oafish businessman and former slave who’s become wealthy enough to buy the estate his family was enslaved by. “Yes, I’ve bought the land on which my father and grandfather were slaves, where they weren’t even allowed in the kitchen,” (Appropriate 8) it concludes. Tactless yet practical, Lopakhin cuts down the cherry orchard for eventual profit in an act of violence that the Lubovs could not commit, even when their own survival was at stake. Lopakin has freed himself and become rich, but he will never possess the kind of vanity that comes with the Lubovs’ privilege. Through Trofimov, the perpetual student, Chekhov sounds notes very close to *Appropriate*, but transplanted into Russian history: “Just think, Anya. Your grandfather, your great-grandfather and all your ancestors owned serfs, they owned human souls. Don’t you see that from every cherry tree in the orchard, from every leaf and every trunk, men and women are gazing at you? Don’t you hear their voices?” (269).

A direct quote from Sam Shepard’s *Buried Child* (1978) emerges in the first entrance of Franz and River, a young couple sneaking into the man’s family home at night, ending the man’s
long absence from his dysfunctional family. Shepard’s Vince and Shelly stumble into a sleeping patriarch who doesn’t recognize Vince as his grandson and ogles Shelly; in *Appropriate*, the sleeper is Franz's teenage nephew Rhys.

Arthur Miller’s 1968 one act, *The Price*, presents siblings who haven’t seen each other in roughly two decades, surrounded by the detritus of their parents’ lives. Like Toni, Bo and Franz in *Appropriate*, The Price’s Victor and Walter disagree deeply on who their father was—a manipulative survivor who withheld the money Victor needed to go to college so that Victor would take care of him, or a good father whose economic misfortune, combined with senility, demanded that Victor give up his own future. One sibling did all the caregiving while the other could become successful, paralleling Toni and Bo in *Appropriate*. *The Price* maximizes the dramatic effect of an oppressive accumulation of possessions and the sense of duty and greed that mix together when it’s time to measure out their worth.

Tracy Letts’ *August: Osage County* (2007) owes a debt to Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1956) and both are implicated by *Appropriate*. Addiction runs through both Letts’ Violet and O’Neill’s Mary, as it does in Franz in *Appropriate*. Beverly Weston takes his secrets to his death in *August: Osage County* just as Daddy has in *Appropriate*. Barbara, Violet and Beverly’s eldest daughter, is, like Jacobs-Jenkins’ Toni, a cauldron of anger and put-upon bossiness whose cruelty can be startling. In *August: Osage County*, secret after secret reveals itself, from Steve’s lechery toward his would-be niece to Ivy and Little Charles’ incestuous relationship. Toni’s line to Rhys, “One day you might need each other. For like a kidney or something” (40), is lifted from Letts’ Violet: “Never know when someone might need a kidney. Better if everyone knows the truth” (133) as she explains why it is better that everyone knows
that her late husband slept with her sister. Additionally, at the top of act two, Letts’ stage direction instructs: “The house has been manifestly refreshed, presumably by Johanna’s hand. The dull, dusty finish has been replaced by the transparent gleam of function” (57).

O’Neill’s family circles around the dual crises of Mary’s morphine addiction and Edmund’s tuberculosis, as they drink and blame one another for their misery. In Long Day’s Journey into Night, O’Neill’s self destructive older brother Jamie tells his brother Edmund, “Think of me as dead—tell people, ‘I had a brother, but he’s dead,’” (166) a mirror of Toni’s line in Appropriate: “If anyone asks, I want you to tell them that this is the weekend your sister died” (56) in her final speech to her brothers.

The playwright has titled his three acts as a riddle: the first and third are named after books of The Bible: The Book of Revelation and The Book of Genesis respectively; act two is named Walpurgisnacht. Separated by a pagan celebration, the Biblical dramaturgy is deliberately backwards and spans the entirety of biblical literature. The Book of Revelation is the last book of the New Testament, an uncharacteristically apocalyptic callback to the Old Testament creator who is angry and vengeful. The Book of Revelation features thunder and lightning, like the spooky storm at the very end of Appropriate, as well as winged beasts with multiple eyes, and it releases the four horsemen of the apocalypse. This relates to Franz's return and the uncovering of secrets in the house. Walpurgisnacht, from the Dutch meaning “witches night,” is celebrated in Germany, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia and the Netherlands with drinking, carnivals and the lighting of bonfires on April 30th through May Day, which is named after the English missionary Saint Walpurga. Bonfires originated from the custom of burning witches (a symbol of winter) in effigy; crowds cheered when a gust of black smoke went up, as though a witch flew
away. In Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* “Walpurgisnacht” is the title of the second act.

Act three is named after The Book of Genesis, which is the first book of the Old Testament in which the world and humankind are created by God. Cain’s murder of Abel may reference the emotional brutality that plays out through the fight scene. God then exiles Cain, similar to Toni exiling herself from her brothers. The theme of birth in The Book of Genesis corresponds to rebirth in *Appropriate*, as in the budding, healthy relationship between Rhys and Cassidy, and the unborn child of Franz and River.

**McCarver Elementary**

Examining my personal connection to *Appropriate* and my need (or right) to tell this story entailed researching a portion of my own life which took me back to growing up in Tacoma, Washington in the 1980s. In 1970, Tacoma’s overall population of roughly 154,000 had seen its minority population double in the previous decade to become approximately 10% of the city’s population³ (United States Commission on Civil Rights 1). But in the same year Tacoma School District No. 10, where I attended school, had an 18.7 percent minority enrollment rate (1). McCarver Elementary was situated in the heart of Tacoma’s hilltop district, a predominantly black neighborhood and had, in 1968, a 91% African American population (Sergienko 47). As such, McCarver was in violation of anti-segregation laws following *Brown v. Board of Education* as a “de facto” segregated school. Under the threat of national action from the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a group consisting of administrators, board members and a citizens’ committee persuaded the district to make McCarver Elementary into the nation’s first magnet school, “a nationwide experiment to
integrate public schools using market-like incentives instead of court orders” (Rossell 44).

Administrators began recruiting white students in white neighborhoods by going door to door, using laws of attraction (instead of the wildly unpopular forced bussing programs in other parts of the US) to bring about a more racially balanced school. Promises of progressive education, arts programs, and technological resources served as the carrot.

By 1970, there was a waiting list for the school, and by 1975, McCarver’s African American population was closer to 40% African American, the percent defined at that time as the maximum ratio of any one minority group before the school was declared “segregated.”

Certainly there is more than one side to the story of magnet schools. Using explicit racial quotas has become “risky” (Rossell 49) in a legal sense and suspect in a humanistic educational sense. Part of how the Tacoma district brought about this new racial balance was by voluntarily bussing Hilltop neighborhood kids to suburban schools,⁴ which were predominantly white; whether this had a uniformly positive effect on those students is up for debate. Effects of desegregation on black students has proved difficult to study,⁵ and moreover, the question of whether magnet schools’ orchestrated racial quotas succeeded in truly achieving desegregated behavior inside the school has been questioned.⁶

In my case, despite growing up in the predominantly white Pacific Northwest and living within the racial lines dividing Tacoma’s neighborhoods, the world I inhabited at school really did look like Sesame Street—a place where diverse populations, faculty and curriculum were a given, in an educational ecosystem that reflected four times the percentage of African Americans in our classrooms as in our city.⁷ It was a vision of progressive education in which people of all races learned from one another in a progressive community, where minority faculty had
increased from 2.9 percent to 9.6 percent between 1968 and 1975.

Yet I remember noticing internalized segregation as young as first grade. Even as a small child, I perceived tensions between students at school. While I remember having plenty of “school friends” of different races, I also remember students of color I was afraid of, and noticed unspoken color lines. The friction between a culture idealistically striving for equality and the lived reality I experienced created an imprint on me, a fissure which has fueled a lifelong inquiry into race relations. My curiosity and desire to close that gap has driven many creative projects as an artist, including *Appropriate*.

After reacquainting myself with American history at the time of the Civil War and Reconstruction period, training my focus on the country’s plantation economy and its impact on African American class and identity, I had a new appreciation of slavery as the skeleton in our collective national closet. The plantation house can not be regarded as charming or romantic after revisiting the politics of economic gain and violent oppression hinging on systematic dehumanization and mass murder of African Americans. I experienced the photographic evidence of that violence—studying the types of lynching photos referred to in the play—as emotionally explosive territory. After my research period, I saw that the “ghosts” of *Appropriate* were hidden in plain sight, just like the characters’ experience of wealth and power at the expense of others has been hidden to them. All of learning and re-learning forced the issue on a personal level; it became important to me to re-examine my own motives in wanting to explore racial themes in my theatrical work. What right did I have to this material? What was the lens I was looking through? Looking at my fundamental experiences of growing up in a multiracial environment with adult eyes gave me insight into why racial tension had long been an
unanswered question in my work. The systematic, yet imperfect attempt to integrate racial groups on the part of city officials, school administrators and my parents had planted seeds in me that continued to grow decades later. My curiosity and restlessness around the topic would carry me through the many uncomfortable hurdles to come during the *Appropriate* process, guided by the desire to participate in a more inclusive and equitable society.
3. Outreach, Part 1

Immediately following my meeting with faculty in which we discussed the need to gather campus partners for *Appropriate*, I began an outreach campaign for Elijah and myself. In mid-May I reached out to the faculty members my theater faculty suggested contacting to ask if they would read the play and meet with me to discuss their opinion of its significance to the University campus. Prof. and assistant provost Dr. Lauretta Frederking, who is also the University’s Title IX coordinator, eventually replied to say it sounded like a fascinating project, but she did not have time to read the play or get involved. Another professor had a strong negative reaction to the synopsis of the play and told me, “I cannot lend my support to this all-white-cast production.” I further appealed to the professor, feeling that she had somehow gotten a mistaken impression of the play, and sent her a video of Jacobs-Jenkins talking about his work, but she said she did not have time to watch it.

This was a blow, but it was informative: despite my carefully worded e-mails, it is easy to get the wrong idea about *Appropriate*’s all-white casting, assume the playwright is also white, and lump it in with a series of campus efforts at holding meetings on inclusion that had left students of color feeling disappointed at lack of action or outright silenced. The University’s Presidential Action Committee on Inclusion (PACOI) had formed in 2016, but received sharp criticism (by sociology Prof. Ashley Mikulyuk, in addition to students) for its March 2016 event that denied students of color the opportunity to speak, and instead issued one-way communication from an all-white panel. A similar event in 2017 was characterized as disappointing for students of color by *The Beacon* (Ramirez). Searching through school newspaper’s archives, I found disturbing campus events centering around vandalism of Black
Lives Matter posters and an ugly 2014 incident at the Chiles Center involving cultural appropriation and disrespect to Latinx individuals. I reached out to individuals named in the articles, like Prof. Mikulyuk, student Mike Aga who’d been on PACOI in spring, and Bethany Sills, then-diversity coordinator, but they were all leaving the campus community for various reasons. I saw I would need to work harder to make contact with stakeholder voices in the racial conversation surrounding *Appropriate* at the University, which was a strong contributing factor in my commitment to seeking out additional voices to include in our process. Looking ahead, I also knew some of these voices could join our talkback discussion.

As a white woman directing the white cast stipulated by *Appropriate*’s black playwright, I realized that before I could begin to delegate responsibilities to our team, I needed to step back and ask them what they thought of the play. I particularly could benefit from hearing more about the experiences of POCs at the University. I hosted a casual get together with Elijah and Kalā with Megan Skype-ing in, where I could get their viewpoints on the play and to ask if Elijah and Kalā would share their experiences of what it’s like to be a POC at University of Portland. (I asked AngelMarie the same questions in a later meeting.)

The conversation opened up my understanding of how the undergraduate population might receive this play, and gave me insight into attending a PWI as part of a minority population. Regarding the latter, their answers held both humor and pathos. We talked about parental advice to go to the Nike outlet to find other black people, and feeling out of place in Hawaii club when you are Hawaiian and everyone else is Japanese. We talked about discussing *Fences* when you are the only black person in class. We talked about growing up Mexican in a town where white people are the minority, but beginning to learn about the culture of your relatives as an adult. We
talked about the role of white people in discussions about racial equality, investigating the
difference between speaking up for what you believe in, and speaking for a group if you’re not a
part of.

Collaborators’ first impressions of the play reminded me that all of the characters are
unappealing in some way, but they all have traits that are recognizable in ourselves, even if we
don’t want to admit it. Toni is harsh, Bo’s opportunism is repellent and only Franz is actively
trying to change his life. They also let me know that some students in the department were put
off by the all-white casting, and that the ones who would get cast may feel intimidated or
embarrassed by taking the topic on.

Learnings from my research project sprang to mind, with possible applications to the
introductory phases of *Appropriate*. One concept that divided the research group was the idea of
“nothing about us without us,” meaning that POCs must be included in any public statements or
demonstrations about issues concerning them specifically to have credibility. Secondly, those
students who accepted that they would make verbal “mistakes” and were ready to ask for
correction from POCs were the most resilient and successful in their handling of the loaded
subject matter. I did not know then that getting corrected by POCs and my ability to accept my
own mistakes would come into play many times throughout the production journey.

Together we came up with our goals for the show: for the white people in the audience to
be implicated by what they saw; that no white person would walk away thinking “That’s not
me.” We wanted audience members, meeting the characters, to “see each other in each other”
and to consider personal, individual actions they could take to advocate for inclusion and social
justice in their own lives. We wanted people to take away questions, such as was Ray a racist?
Questions of equity, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) are burning in the theater community across the country right now. In attending the Theatre Communications Group (TCG) annual conference in Portland, June 2017, it became clear how deeply, in the first summer of President Trump’s term, our nation’s current cultural moment is steeped in civil rights. At TCG, I attended sessions named “Why ED&I?” and “Non-racist resources for white people,” as well as a keynote address by author/speaker Jeff Chiang, who spoke about Oregon’s racist history and state constitution, and the ongoing need for desegregation, a word we associate with the 1960s, which has become important to consider in today’s rapidly gentrifying cities. Chiang got me thinking about McCarver, the magnet elementary school I attended growing up in Tacoma, Washington, which I discuss in “Research.” Most notably, I saw a production of *Hands Up*, produced by the Red Door Project and directed by Kevin Jones, and stayed for the talkback discussion hosted by Jones and Red Door partner Lesli Mones. The show, which depicts African-American responses to police violence, is raw and powerful, and the talkback had a fair amount of tension in the room. “Speak from your body,” Jones requested, “not from your head,” explaining that this usually made for a more honest and compassionate dialogue.

The talkback was jarring as tensions rose and hurtful words were exchanged despite efforts not to. One speaker was a retired firefighter who had started a ridealong internship program for teens of color to help bridge the divide between youth and civil servants following the deaths of five police officers in Dallas in July 2016. Jones rapidly called him out for failing to acknowledge that the cops were shot in response to two deaths of African American men at the hands of police officer mere weeks before. The firefighter was the type of man I’d see more of,
and even be “mistaken for,” throughout the outreach process: a white person who saw
themselves as a “do-gooder” and wanted congratulations, yet was blind to his own insensitivity.
Jones and Mones’ both brought gravity to the discussion, weaving its unwieldy threads together
and calling out moments of tension or misconception.

Following a suggestion from Elijah, we were able to schedule a Skype meeting with
Brandon Rivera, the newly elected president of Associated Students of University of Portland
(ASUP), to discuss his impressions of the play. He loved what the playwright was saying with
*Appropriate* and he thought it was important for University students to be exposed to its
messages. He further offered that he would be happy to participate in our talkback, that ASUP
was 100% behind our production, and that ASUP would likely be able to contribute funds to help
promote the show or produce an auxiliary event in association with our production. Brandon’s
enthusiasm was infectious, and his offer of financial support completely unexpected. At the
Association of Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) conference that summer, I was lucky
enough to attend a session called “Radical Inclusion: Tactics for Fostering Dynamic, Productive
Learning Spaces for Discussing Race” moderated by Martine Kei Green-Rogers of the
University of Utah featuring presenters La Donna Forsgren from Notre Dame University,
Jocelyn Buckner from Chapman University, and Rachel DeSoto Jackson from Indiana University
of Pennsylvania, as well as several other presenters and attendees. Here was the frank
conversation I’d been looking for every since my research project that spring—pitfalls of
discussing race in the classroom. Presenters described the ashen faces of students after a history
lecture on lynching, or white students chasing a black teacher after class, apologizing in advance
for anything they say in class that might sound racist. One presenter asserted her need to “mark
my body” as a white woman in front of a classroom of black students, to name her privilege before she deserved their attention. Forsgren’s presentation discussed her lived classroom experiences as a black woman teaching at a PWI and revisited the original definition of white fragility by Robin DiAngelo:

White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium (54).

In this definition I saw very clearly the actions of the students I had researched that spring, and I knew this same behavior was a very real possibility with my *Appropriate* cast and crew. As an antidote, presenters discussed the need to communicate clearly that the intention is not to make them feel bad or guilty but to educate them about historical facts to create awareness in the present and consciousness in the future. “Release the feelings, but not the learnings,” was one proposed catchphrase to stop white students from falling down a rabbit hole of shame. Later I heard another good catchphrase: “Take it seriously but not personally.”

DeSoto Jackson shared her experiences of co-hosting talkbacks after her University’s production of *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South West Africa, From the German Südwestafrika, Between the Years 1884 - 1915* (hereafter referred to as *We Are Proud to Present*…) by Jackie Sibblies Drury and shared findings about how the talkback methodology she used literally changed people’s perspectives (see “Outreach, Part 2”). Green-Rogers explained the index card exercise I would use on my first day of rehearsal (discussed in “Auditions/Casting/Rehearsal”). Buckner spoke about the fear and mistrust she experienced as a white teacher from white students when she taught black playwrights. She told a story of the resistance she experienced when she put Jacobs-Jenkins’ *An
*Octoroon* on her syllabus, and the turning point that came when she and her students arrived at the message from the playwright himself which intimates that we don’t have language to talk about race. After initial resistance, the department was eventually converted to the works of Branden Jacobs-Jenkins and added *Appropriate* to its main stage that fall. It was in this session I learned about *Living with Lynching*, a collection of short plays penned by African American authors during further expanded my thinking on how to think and talk about lynching as a part of our history (see "Research"). The conversation was rich, and I silently formed a goal to have a talkback after each performance of *Appropriate* instead of just one.

During the session in which I co-presented, “On the Presentation of the Real in Stage Violence,” moderated by Jonathan Cole of Willamette University, the importance of integrating the fight choreographer into all aspects of the production—including auditions—was emphasized. My co-presenters discussed how much of actors can be seen in how they learn and enact fight choreography. Despite coming from a choreography background, I had not thought of this. I made a mental note to ask fight choreographer Kristin Mun about her availability for auditions.

In August, Elijah and I met with Carmen Suarez, Vice President of Global Diversity at Portland State University (PSU) and Lisa Grady-Willis, Director of Diversity Education and Learning at PSU. I had contacted Suarez through a mutual friend to gauge her interest in joining a talkback discussion. I was starting to dream big about what the *Appropriate* talkback could be: a group of fierce warriors for racial equity sharing their perspectives. Suarez referred me to Lisa Grady-Willis, who has a background in theater, and set up a date for all of us to meet. By the end of the meeting I would find out that Carmen brought us together specifically to vet my intentions
and cultural competency before handing me off to her colleague, but would not leave before expanding my point of view herself.

Lisa had read the play in advance of our meeting, and I was delighted to find that she had taught theater, and black theater specifically, at former institutions she’d worked at. She thought the play had some very strong messages and she was interested in supporting them, but needed some background on why we had come to her and what we hoped to accomplish. In the tumble of words that followed, I brought up the post-show discussion after *Rodney King* by Roger Guenveur Smith that had rocked the theater community negatively the prior April. Grady-Willis and Suarez did not know details on the *Rodney King* talkback, but knew it was negative. Certainly, white people organizing talkbacks around black plays and artists did not have a good name in the community at that moment—rocky talkbacks after the local professional production of *We Are Proud to Present*... were still in recent memory, including AngelMarie’s.

With Elijah’s help I attempted to summarize the climate at the University of Portland, describing the 1% African American student body, including international students. Suarez swiftly cut me off: African-American and African students were not the same, she explained, and pointed out that it’s ignorant to lump them together by skin color in a demographic, when they have in reality very different levels of privilege. Often international students are actually coming from a very high degree of privilege—that is why they can come to the US to study—and those international students have no idea what it’s like to grow up African American in the US. I thanked her for bringing this aspect to my attention.

We told them that our goal was to have students moderate the talkback discussion(s), Elijah being one of them. Grady-Willis let me know that we would likely want to have an
experienced moderator physically/visually present to provide authoritative leadership to the talkback discussions, backing up the student moderation team to prevent experiences like what happened after Rodney King. Grady-Willis was interested in participating; above and beyond the talkback, she offered us a learning event of the type she does as Director of Diversity at PSU. She asked us what we would want the learning event to be centered around. I suggested the idea of allyship, and what white people can do to support and advance the cause of racial justice. She thought for a moment, mentioning that for some in the field, ally had become a “bad word.” She asked some more questions about our campus makeup (some of which I could not easily answer, such as the percentage of faculty of color, or emphasis on non-European curriculum). She formulated the idea of a learning event on “Race, Power and Privilege,” and I saw that the way she was thinking about this subject was more sophisticated and inclusive than I had been. She also let us know that PSU’s chair of the new School of Gender, Race and Nations, Winston Grady-Willis, was her husband—and that he might be convinced to participate. Although Suarez and Grady-Willis had warmed to Elijah and I by the end of the meeting, I wrote that I felt I was on “shaky ground,” but was “forging ahead” afterward. Moreover, I noted my feelings of having been put in my place, but felt grateful that someone had taken the time to educate me. Elijah and I rapidly brainstormed logistics of the workshop.

In following up with Grady-Willis to provide some of the demographics she had asked for in the meeting, I shared my findings:

- “Just one percent of University of Portland students are black,” The Beacon reported in 2016. “To be precise, only 39 out of 3,741 students are listed as African-American, according to Institutional Research” (Andrews).
- According to University marketing, 35% of full time undergrads identified as minority students in 2015.
- The Beacon reported, “In the 2014-2015 academic school year, out of 339 faculty
members, only 30 were members of a minority group” (Aguilar).

- Latest Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data avail (see fig. 1), “Percent of all students enrolled, by race/ethnicity, and percent of students who are women: Fall 2015.”

On a tip from Brandon, I reached out to PACOI through Bill Jenkins, Director of Employee Relations and Staff Diversity. A meeting was arranged for Elijah and I with Jenkins and Dr. Joane Moceri, head of the school of nursing and chair of PACOI. Jenkins, an African American man, appreciated *Appropriate*’s sharp social critique and surprising humor. He noted how the adults in *Appropriate* saw themselves as protecting their kids from the harsh reality of our nation’s history of racial inequity, but it was really their own discomfort with the subject they were protecting. Initially cagey, once we explained to Dr. Moceri and Jenkins what we meant by a “talkback,” they were open to having a PACOI representative participate. I had thought participating in this talkback would be a good opportunity for PACOI to build some positive public relations to counteract some of the bad press they had received in the *The Beacon* in the past two years, but both Dr. Moceri and Jenkins seemed unconcerned. They clarified that they only advise the President, and had no actual power as a committee. Additionally, Dr.
Moceri said that they didn’t want to be seen as “chasing the issue” as student concerns shifted from Black Lives Matter one year, to LGBTQ inclusion the next. Elijah and I were glad they were interested in lending support, and Bill’s enthusiasm was palpable.

On the recommendation of costume designer AngelMarie Summers, Elijah and I next met with Dr. Rebecca Gaudino, a theology professor. Dr. Gaudino teaches a class on death and suffering, and AngelMarie had suggested I speak with her because Dr. Gaudino had an interesting view on race having grown up in Africa as a white woman. Dr. Gaudino spoke to Elijah and I about structural violence in the context of the plantation system in America, as well as the phenomenon of intergenerational trauma, as exemplified by generations of native people in America who’s land and resources have been stolen over the course of history. She also touched on the concept of “complicated grief,” meaning a grieving process that is interrupted by an outside circumstance.

Structural violence is a societal term referencing systems that injure or violate groups and do not allow the groups to achieve their full potential. The plantation system in America was part of a legal and economic system that commodified black bodies. Intergenerational transmission of historical trauma is the principal that consequences of collective injury carry through time. Because violence dehumanizes the inflicter, the whites in Appropriate have traumatized themselves through the five generations of owning the property. Further, the cicadas transmit this “song” from parents to children without anyone knowing how.

Dr. Gaudino possesses an emotional depth in her understanding of violence and trauma, having witnessed it firsthand as she was growing up and carrying it within her family history. I knew I wanted her to relay the sense of gravity she understand to the cast, to help them
understand the kind of devastation white people inflicted on black people throughout the building of our country. Her insights into the play were also stunning, from drawing connections between unconsciously inherited prejudice and Cassidy’s line, “a memory of a song that they think is just a part of them.” She also made me think about Bo’s crying at the end in a completely different way, offering the possibility and the hope that that character might feel guilty and responsible for the violence his family and indeed white people have done to black people historically, instead of just crying for himself. Her discussion of intergenerational trauma gave me an idea about a possible connection between Toni’s emotional cruelty being handed down from a Simon Legree type of evil overseer. Finally, she elaborated on the biblical aspects of the act names, taking my understanding further than it had been when I had written my concept and approach. The Book of Revelation is apocryphal literature, depicting a sudden and violent end of the Roman empire and the destruction (perhaps linked to the destruction of the house) it will bring. Conversely, the Book of Genesis is a new beginning, which sounds simple, but in reality is not. What would true forgiveness involve for the Lafayettes? How do you forgive a dead person? Forgiveness and rebuilding of trust takes time; at the end of the play, time passes in fast forward. True genesis of a new beginning could take centuries.

I reached out to Kevin Jones to inquire if we could afford to bring him in to consult what I was starting to think of as a moderation team led by Kalā and Elijah. Jones was immediately interested, but his hourly rate would get us only a small amount of time with him, and he was not available to be an on-site moderation mentor on our performance nights. However, he also offered us free tickets to Hands Up and the opportunity to use that as a real life example of how the talkback works in person, with a follow-up to debrief the experience. I took him up on his
offer and decided I would keep working to find another consultant to be our on-site moderation mentor. I’d gotten positive recommendations to Resolutions Northwest, though their staff was so busy, they were hard to pin down for an initial meeting. We eventually connected once school had started (see “Outreach, Part 2”).

I asked Jones about the optimal size of the group he was willing to work with. I had been thinking of his consulting as a mentorship, so had Kalā and Elijah, and perhaps AngelMarie, in mind as the recipients of his consulting. They were the POCs on the design/production side (not actors who needed to be memorizing lines) and they were involved the earliest. However, Kevin made it clear that he was happy to open this consultation process to as any *Appropriate* participants who wanted to attend. He added it would be unfair of me to expect the POCs involved in my process to pick up this extra project, and reminded me it is not the responsibility of POCs to educate white people on cultural literacy. Embarrassed but grateful, I thanked him for the tune up in my point of view.

By initiating the first steps of an outreach plan that would connect our work to school and community resources, the gravity of real-life implications of this topic became clear. In light of the national conversation on race erupting in educational and theatrical convening nationwide, principals in the play were no longer just on the page. Precepts of structural violence discussed with Dr. Gaudino hit home; my enthusiasm about bringing in consultants like Lisa Grady-Willis and Kevin Jones was tempered by gentle reminders that I, too, had a lot to learn. The potential for misunderstanding *Appropriate* and its aims had been dramatically demonstrated from my first email. By the time our rehearsal process began, I was stepping in with a lot of hope and a bit of trepidation that I had the authority to lead the process.
4. Style/Script Analysis/Approach

At a moment in history when the removal of Confederate monuments had caused protests and bloody counterprotests in August of 2017, the relevance of producing *Appropriate* was clear. In my own campus community, a white professor antagonized me for doing an “all-white-cast production” without taking the time to understand the play. The cultural-political environment since the 2016 presidential election was fraught with derision, creating a clear need for connection in communities across America through the mutual experience of artistic expression. Setting our production in the summer of 2017, rather than in 2013 when the play debuted at the Humana Festival of New American Plays, had originally been my attempt to connect *Appropriate* to the racially charged shootings of African American men Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, as well as five Dallas police officers, during the summer of 2016. However, the era-defining changes in our country since President Donald Trump took office in January 2017 outshined the events of the previous summer. President Trump’s equivocating response to the white nationalists in Charlottesville was further alarming proof that our nation’s legacy of white supremacy continues to be widely accepted and unquestioned. Our production team’s goal of making the predominantly white audience at University of Portland and greater Portland question its complicity was best said by Sontag: could the audience see “how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering” (102)?

In this chapter I will discuss how these ideas filtered into the conceptual treatment of the play and my process of defining the style and tone of the play in relationship to realism. I discuss script analysis through the framework of “action analysis” (see below), in addition to examining play’s various environments and character analyses. I will then describe how these choices
informed my approach.

4.1 Concept

Before beginning, I had thought that a contemporary play like *Appropriate* didn’t need a strong conceptual treatment as much as my best effort to honor as closely as possible the proposals on the page. However, throughout the process I found that there were plenty of choices to be made which would determine our production’s point of view. For example, the ultra poetic stage direction calling for a sound cue that encompasses all the actions of human existence, and the final scene in which a director and design team must make time move faster and faster. These provocations alone demanded a practical interpretation which would, consciously or not, define the director’s “concept.”

My interpretation of *Appropriate* was that the house is a character that activates the family with the force of history and the “evil spirits” it contains from its past. Adults revert to childish behavior as they re-enter a poisoned family system. Hot weather, grief, old grudges and mixed motivations drive them to emotional and physical violence. “I am afraid around [your family] because they are violent!” Rachael explains to Bo (*Appropriate* 53).

The house is also a massive symbol of the original plantation owners and ill-gotten wealth passing between five generations, resting on bodies of the slaves which are part of the dirt. The disrepair of the once grand home is a reflection of Ray’s disordered mind and spirit, entered into by his children as they mourn the father they lost. Grief gives way to unease as the siblings learn that the house contains secrets the siblings were not privy to. Though the siblings never knew slaves, their lives and the privilege they enjoy are inextricably linked with the heritage of the
house. The photo album is evidence of this fact, and becomes another symbol the family tries to hide, sell, profit from, destroy, and reconcile with before it becomes a mass of sopping wet shame, dredged from the bottom of the lake that symbolizes the history of race in America.

Stepping back, I can see that our production’s conceptual focus was trained on the tensions of sibling relationships, and the humor that came out of this tension. Cultivating the humor in turn affected our style to lean toward a heightened version of realism verging on the ridiculous. Though we did not get all the way to absurdism, as I ventured to guess in my preproduction writing, in practice I embraced the comedic aspects not only as “seasoning,” as I’d written about, but as a hearty side dish. Our audiences watched *Appropriate* through the lens of a presidency exclusionary to immigrants, discriminatory toward Middle Easterners, and soft on censure toward white nationalist/supremacist ideology. Finally, having Cassidy and Ainsley played by adult students in our production added a dimension to the last moment of the play in which the actor who played Ainsley inspects the house. Some thought this was part of a concept in which Ainsley came back to the house that may have still been in his family, which was unintentional but another layer of possible meaning that was not unwelcome. My concept around the final scene was that the sands of time will destroy a rupture that is not healed. The final scene was meant to be a triumphant, perhaps overly optimistic portrayal of the universe defeating evil over time. In reality, most audience members interpreted the house being acted on by evil spirits, or that the sickness of the family system had infected the house.

In preproduction, I had also believed that most of the family has been defeated by their past by the end of the show. Yet in action, there was a hint of feeling that Toni heading for a re-evaluation of her life, not unlike Nora at the end of *A Doll’s House*. Toni, like Nora, learns late
in life that she has been deluded for years. Toni tells Franz and Bo, “All I really tried to do was love you. I promise. Maybe I don’t know how—you know, maybe I never did—but I need to figure that out for myself, starting today” (*Appropriate* 55). It is reminiscent of Nora’s reply to Torvald in Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* when he says, “You don’t understand the conditions of the world in which you live” and she replies “No, I don’t. But now I am going to try.” Bo does not give textual evidence of changing, but we made the choice that in his last moments in the house he has seen the bigger picture, rather than just “crumpled,” as I’d thought during preproduction. As predicted, the sense of hope for the future comes from Franz’s unborn son and the intimation that River can forgive Franz, with a secondary focus on Cassidy and Rhys realizing they can re-make their own familial relationship independent of their parents.

Before rehearsal, my primary goals were to focus on language and allow staging to emerge from actor intention. My questions before I began the process were how best to make the familial relationships real between the actors, and create a sense of family history to fuel the actions in the play. I knew this would involve a delicate balance of cultivating organic actor impulse, heightening it to what I called “the subtle ridiculousness of the characters” in my preproduction writing, and crafting it for the stage. I later did not think the ridiculousness was subtle at all.

### 4.2 Style, tone, and realism

The question of style, tone and realism was slightly unclear as I embarked on auditions. In response to questions from Prof. Golla, I reworked some of my preproduction writing about what kind of realism we were doing, when we would depart from it, and to what effect. The clearest way to approach this was by working backwards: I saw the sharpest departures from realism strategically placed at the beginning and end of the show, as well as at the climax of the fight.
scene leading into the reveal of the KKK hood. Jacobs-Jenkins uses these bookended poetic/expressionistic gestures as a largely non-human framing device through which the audience watched a realistic comedic drama take place, the effect being to place the action of these specific characters within a larger context which signifies a national or political statement questioning history and our ability as people to change.

Returning to the question of what kind of realism we were doing, my view was that the bulk of the play inhabits an elevated realism that blossoms into the kind of broadness that justifies deliberate cruelty and black comedy. The unappealing qualities of the characters, such as Franz’s pedophilia, Toni’s viciousness and Bo’s spinelessness, would be a bit of a put-off for audiences, so watching each character get punished in some way for his/her moral shortcomings would be satisfying.

Arthur Miller is one of the giants of the American theater that Jacobs-Jenkins refers in *Appropriate*, and *Death of a Salesman* presents a working model for the kind of realism I aspired to. In *Salesman*, the audience watches real-time domestic scenes between a man and his family, yet Miller takes us inside Willy’s head in sharp departures of memory triggered by events in the present. The sudden appearance of Biff and Happy as younger boys or a visit from Willy’s brother Ben broke up the chronological plot with expressionistic detours to various points in the past. I saw the cicadas, fight scene and house destruction as similar devices. Further, the symbolism of Willy’s seeds and the encroachment of urban life in contrast to the wide open West where Biff believes he can be himself have parallels in the weighty significance of *Appropriate*’s photo album, jars and hood.

Of the fight scene specifically, I imagined the fight first pushing the boundaries of realism,
and then going well past them. I saw this as an underscoring gesture of the playwright reaching for spectacle as one of the most impactful tools in the dramatist’s toolkit to drive home a point. The concluding beat of the fight brings Ray’s potential racism much closer to actuality.

With regard to tone, I conceptualized ours as “darkly funny and awful,” pointing to situations in *August, Osage County* (and the dramas it was modeled on, like *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*) as a model for the tone of scenes like Franz’s discovery of Rhys in the masturbation scene. Such moments would be “painful, delicious, [and] revolting,” with a biting or sardonic edge. The characters’ positive and negative qualities operating at the same time crash into each other to create a “laugh and immediately cover your mouth” reaction. I had thought this was all I needed to know, but in the middle of the rehearsal period I felt some unresolved questions of style and tone come back. Interestingly, they applied much more to the realistic scene work rather than the moments of expressionism.

I became aware of needing to dial up and dial down different sociological points of view, such as Bo’s “I didn’t give your grandmother any blankets” perspective against Rachael’s “I don’t expect you to understand discrimination” voice. I saw that our production would have very different effects in how loud or soft these opposing voices—and the groups they represent—existed in relationship to one another. The simplest way to boil this down was that the siblings needed to be more insensitive, leaning toward racism, and the voices of opposition from Rachael and in the end, from River, needed to be very clear as they pierced through the Lafayette shield of non-responsibility. Midway through the process I saw that we needed to turn the volume of the family up in order to put their failings fully on display, the way Martha in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* must bray.
This meant I had to keep growing an even more heightened style from the actors which would display their privilege, their lack of sensitivity and sense of perpetual rightness. In turn, the voices of Rachael and River needed to pierce through this wall of rightness, but with difficulty. Making both of those characters, who have something smart and important to say, seem unattractive or unappealing in the process of trying to get through the Lafayettes’ thick skulls, added a welcome complexity to the whole. In reality the fight scene was ridiculous, even comedic at moments, but had cringe-worthy bite. It was unbelievable, and represented the family’s viciousness laid bare without words. Revealing the KKK hood as the button of the fight was immediately sobering (for most), hitting us in the gut.

In considering the question of style, it is worth noting that perhaps Jacobs-Jenkins is part of a new style being forged in contemporary theater. Some critics have coined the term “antirealism” or “normcore” in discussing *Appropriate*, along with Young Jean Lee’s *Straight White Men*. Isaac Butler defines antirealism as “works that wear the trappings and mimic the gestures of those realistic, subscriber-friendly plays, particularly the Living-Room Play, for the purposes of subversion and critique,” whereas David Cote defines normcore as “experimental plays dressing up like fourth-wall family dramas.” Stephen Karam’s *The Humans*, premiering two years after *Appropriate*, is a fourth-wall family drama culminating in a shadow play dramatizing the patriarch’s existential dilemma about whether to enter the tunnel that keeps reappearing in his nightmares.

Like Jacobs-Jenkins, Lee is another a writer of color who depicted white characters through a lens of realism that was intentionally warped. *Straight White Men* portrays a father and sons who struggle through a Christmas season in realistic fashion, yet gleefully play a homemade
Monopoly game called Privilege, dance freakishly to hip hop music and play-act gay sexuality. “Straight White Men is a family drama that on the surface looks fairly standard, but the play transcends psychological realism” (McNulty, “‘Straight White Men’ gently wrestles…”). Like Jacobs-Jenkins, Lee mixes the colors of realism with nonrealistic performance art gestures, such as her directive that “the pre-show music, curtain speech, and transitions…should create a sense that the show is under the control of people who are not straight white men” (Straight White Men 62). Knowing Jacobs-Jenkins obtained a graduate degree in Performance Studies from New York University, assisted performance artist Claude Wampler and created solo performance art early in his career (Bent) helps to marry the opposing ideas of classic playwriting against his background in performance studies and performance art.

4.3 Script analysis

Using James Thomas’s method from Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers as a guide, I determined the seed word for Appropriate to be self-interest. This speaks on one level to the individual level of selfishness of the characters in the family, and their propensity to place their own interests above the good of the family as a whole. Toni tells Rhys she wants the weekend to be “about us,” but Rachael wants to make the trip a learning journey for her kids about Southern history. River wants to stake out her piece of the Lafayette estate distribution through Franz’s return to the family for reasons that relate to her own interests and the unborn child. Franz is trying to transcend his own selfishness and a past absorbed in the pursuit of pleasure, which has brought shame to his family. Bo is absorbed in the possibility that his income may be in danger. Self-interest taken to its ultimate extreme speaks to putting profits before lives as the value system that justifies oppression.
The theme, or what Thomas calls the play’s response to the seed, is poisonous inheritance. The Layfayettes did not ask to one day own Ray’s broken-down house full of junk, in the same way that white people in 2017 did not ask to inherit the evils of the country’s founders. They have received a poisonous inheritance of self-interest. As a family, they have inherited wealth and power built on the unjust playing field our country was founded on. As individuals, the Lafayettees have inherited a birth order and genders that set the course for expectations and roles—to be the caregiver, the successful achiever, or the “fuckup.”

Philosophical statements in the play underline societal inheritance of privilege and power, explored through the natural world of cicadas when Cassidy asks:

How do you think the baby cicadas learn the song? Is it just something that’s programmed in them? Or maybe they just pick it up somewhere, listening when they’re eggs. Maybe they’re hearing it in their sleep, and that’s how they learn? And their parents are dead, but they have this memory of a song that they think is just a part of them... (Appropriate 41).

The playwright tells us about the depth of the messages in the cicada song in two stage directions, one which is “enormously complicated, deeply-layered, entirely improvised” (Appropriate 57) and which encompasses the entirety of life and existence with references to “waking up and flying around and what it is like to fly around and about loving each other and hating each other and fucking each other and hurting each other but also about trying to find each other in order to hurt and/or fuck each other” (57). This song contains “the feeling of missing the thing you can never go back to” (57), which entertains notions of poisonous inheritance, the nature of forgiveness and the definition of family.

Looking at the title as a means of revealing theme, the playwright thinks of it as both adjective and verb. In one sense, it is appropriate that this family must deal with the estate, both in the immediate sense and in the symbolic sense of what the estate represents. As a verb,
cultural appropriation is certainly an ongoing concern; however, Jacobs-Jenkins has disclosed that he himself took something from every play he loves.

External events are defined by Thomas as happenings that change everything for the characters in the given circumstances of a play. *Appropriate* begins with Franz and River’s arrival as the inciting incident; Toni’s unhappy reaction to seeing her youngest brother for the first time in ten years is what begins to unspool the backstory throughout the beginning of act one. The previous action is Ray’s convalescence and death, which prompted Cassidy to secretly find Franz on Facebook against her parents’ wishes. Meanwhile Toni has called the family together to auction the house and hold an estate sale, but Bo discovers the proceeds may not cover the loan payoff due to the challenges of liquidating Ray’s assets. Franz is a disturbance to this situation partly because his girlfriend is demanding Franz get his third of the proceeds from the sales, which is salt in Toni’s unhealed wounds from attempting to help Franz during his years as an addict. This situation sets up a family dynamic riddled with deeply held grudges and a culture of communication that is characterized by meanness and persecution among family members, offering a startling glimpse behind what on the outside would look like a well-off upper middle class family riddled with morally reprehensible issues just under the surface. Into this domestic drama cuts the discovery of the photo album, marking the turning point of the show after which things cannot be the same.

Franz’s heartfelt apology to his siblings for his errant behavior while addicted to drugs and alcohol is then not only rejected but ridiculed by Toni, after which she seemingly snaps and leaves the house enraged, we learn later, to cancel the estate sale for which the whole family has assembled. Bo discovers the pictures may be worth close to one million dollars, freeing the
siblings from any debt they may be yoked with from the estate. However in Franz’s attempt to heal his backward family, he “baptizes” himself and the family by disposing of the photo album into the lake. In the melee that follows, Franz’s act of impregnating a 12-year-old is revealed, threatening his relationship with River and inflaming Rachael’s righteousness in protecting her child. Rachael’s grandstanding about her family’s superiority is the catastrophic event that leads inevitably to the play’s climax—a physical fight that erupts between Toni and Rachael, but ends up involving the entire family and is only stopped by the stupefaction of finding Ainsley wearing a KKK hood. In the falling action of the show Franz attempts to retrieve the photo album out of the lake to please his siblings, and Toni apologizes to Franz before saying goodbye to her brothers forever. Time speeds up in the final moments of the show, showing the audience a time-lapsed destruction of the house over the next several decades before landing on a stranger investigating the damage of the house and leaving it.

The given circumstances depict an upper middle class white family in southeast Arkansas preparing to sell the a former plantation house the family has owned for five generations, where the family’s patriarch recently passed away. The year is not specified by the playwright, but it is summer.

Internal events, or the growth of the seed within the external event, occur when the characters see an opportunity for gain in the objects and events that unfold. An important internal event is when Cassidy tells River that the photo album might be worth something. This idea spreads from River to Toni to Bo, whose life may be changed by the “upper six figures” (Appropriate 46) the album could fetch. But self-interest isn’t always monetary for the Lafayettes. Another internal event is Toni cancelling the estate sale in order to spite Rachael,
which gives her emotional gratification at the expense of financial loss. Franz tries to transcend self-interest by throwing the photo album into the lake for the good of the family. At the same time, he is a victim of his own self-interest in that he wishes to baptize himself and distance himself from the acts of his past.

Thomas’s concept of three major parts appears in multiple forms. There are the act breaks in the three act structure and the three artifacts (photo album, the specimen jars, and the KKK hood) that comprise the play’s most striking progression. As these incriminating artifacts surface, tension for the characters rises as they feel more and more disgust for the legacy they come from. However, structurally the three major parts are: 1) Franz and River’s arrival to the discovery of the photo album; 2) Toni’s resulting denial of Ray’s racism through the fight scene; and 3) Rachael’s demand to leave immediately through the unnamed appraiser closing the door of the house.

As the main character, Franz’s superobjective is to reconnect with his family and gain personal renewal achieved through the eyes of his siblings. His through action is to attain mutual reconciliation with his extended family for both his hurtful action and their lack of awareness about the hardships he faced, and when that fails, he attempts to save the family from its toxic history. When that fails, he attempts to win back their favor by righting the wrong he has committed, which may have cost them a small fortune. Franz’s through action concludes with a last attempt at connecting with his brother in a loving way, and the eventual conclusion that he will try to reconcile with River. Toni’s counter through action is to hold Frank accountable for the wrongs he committed against her and the family, and to stop him from committing future crimes she believes him to be capable of, ten years later. After succumbing to physical violence
and fully losing the respect of her son due to her hypocrisy, Toni makes a decision to discover how to truly love another human being.

4.4 Economic, political, social and religious environment

The economic environment of the characters is tenuous, contributing to the drama of Appropriate by threatening to pull the safety net of wealth out from under the comfortable characters. Toni recently lost her job, and is now a single mother to Rhys following her divorce. Bo and Rachael are seemingly well off and living in Brooklyn, but Rachael does not know that Bo is in danger of losing his job. Both Bo and Toni are jealous of the perceived income of the other from earned income or alimony. Some part of Ray’s half million dollar loan must be repaid to the bank, and will become debt transferred to his children if the sale of the estate does not cover the payoff. The siblings’ financial comfort hangs in the balance during the play. Conversely, Franz is cut off from the family wealth and has most likely been living hand to mouth as he completes recovery. River is a vegan chef, presumably with a low or variable income; the two have nothing (monetary) to lose, which may allow them to gamble on rejoining the family.

The political environment is polarized and chaotic. The Trump administration has opened a division in America’s body politic following a bitter campaign year in 2016. I’d imagine Toni voted for Trump, Bo and Rachael voted for Hillary, and Franz and River had organized for Bernie—which reflects the internal divisions between three people raised in the same household who now hold very different values. President Trump’s ties to white supremacist ideology through Breitbart News and advisors such as Steve Bannon are disturbingly known to the American public. President Trump’s stance on white nationalist/supremacist demonstrators in Charlottesville, Virginia failed to condemn a violent act of murder built on hateful ideology. A
distinct exclusionary message was sent to Muslim countries subject to the travel ban, as well as to Mexico with the possible building of a wall along the American-Mexican border. The President’s antics serve to “normalize” and reinforce white privilege.

The social environment of the play is one that is isolated and removed from other parts of the characters’ lives. The house isn’t part of any of the siblings’ everyday life, so the event is unique in that it calls for a reunion in a place from their childhood, with their own kids, and away from anyone they’re not related to. The Lafayettes are isolated from the rest of the town and people that live there. Toni knows Juanita, Ray’s caregiver, but no other friends are mentioned in the “horrible town” (Appropriate 24).

Religion is a slippery presence in Appropriate. One character’s Jewishness is grounds for another’s possible anti-Semitism, but Judaism as a religion does not present itself in Bo and Rachael’s family practices. Otherwise religion isn’t mentioned by the characters in the play, other than when Toni uncharacteristically tells Rhys “I thank God for you,” in a serious moment that he later mocks. River speaks about her sensitivity to unseen presences, and indirectly references Alcoholics Anonymous ideology, which includes surrendering to a Higher Power. This absence of religion in the characters’ lives contrasts the Biblical references in titles of the acts “The Book of Revelations” and “The Book of Genesis,” making them seem oblivious to the larger forces at work on them.

4.5 Character analyses

The characters in Appropriate can be categorized in three sets: siblings, partners, and children. Ray’s three children comprise the siblings, of whom Toni is the eldest. Toni is in her late 40s and is the eldest child of the three Lafayette siblings. She is judgmental, bitter, and reactive. She used
to be a “sweet girl,” but her sweetness ran out: two people refer to her as poison. She is recently divorced from her teenage son’s father and was the primary caregiver during Ray’s convalescence and death, commuting 12 hours from Atlanta. Toni was a school principal at her son’s school, but lost her job when Rhys is found to be responsible for selling (Toni’s) prescription painkillers at school, which causes a student’s death. She is “scarier” (Appropriate 29) than Franz remembers. There is room for doubt about whether the estate sale company was actually robbing them, or if Toni fired them because she was uncomfortable with disposing of Ray’s belongings. Bo accuses Toni of not being fit to be the executor of the estate with the amount of personal turmoil she has been experiencing. She ends the play wanting to be divorced from the family, and wanting her brothers to act as though she’d died. She is very strong willed and refuses to believe that their father was racist, and might have hidden it from them. Toni flouts decorum and instead courts conflict both verbal and physical, first by deliberately using a racial slur against Rachael and then by starting the fight by pulling her hair. Bo says “Everyone knows Toni is crazy—” (Appropriate 53) and Rachael calls her a “sociopath” (45).

Bo is also in his late 40s and the middle child. He is not as much a mediator as a flipflopper, alternately supporting and disavowing their father’s possible racism at different points in the play. As a young man, he went to college in New Haven, likely a reference to Yale University. He is an urbanite and never liked the “cesspool” (Appropriate 38) of the lake. We learn he is in danger of losing his job (which isn’t named, but the corporate office may shut down his entity) and is concerned about how he’ll continue to support his family’s high standard of living in Brooklyn if he does. Bo and Rachael are trying to protect Cassidy and Ainsley from the evil influences of the world, including the Internet and predators. Bo has been sharing the
burden of taking care of Ray with Toni, managing and covering the Ray’s expenses for the last two years out of pocket. He wasn’t paying close enough attention to notice when the loan payments lapsed. He begins the play in defense mode, trying to calm Toni down about Franz’s presence. He ends in a crumpled heap saying “I don’t know” and “Why don’t I know?” His sense of decorum is less of a peacemaker and more of a de-escalator. He is an opportunist, he is under stress, and has a weak will. His moral stance is also weak, he wants problems to go away or to hide from them; he doesn’t want to have to explain any of this to his children and doesn’t think he needs to. He says he or his lawyers will deal with the property but neither does, as we see the house is destroyed by time.

Franz is the problem child, in his late 30s, the youngest of the three. Franz, formerly known as Frank, has been out of contact with the rest of his family for the last ten years, and is currently remaking himself with his new name (perhaps inspired by River, née Trisha). He started drinking at age 13 after their mother died, prompting their father to uproot the family from their house in DC, move back to Arkansas, and take out a half million dollar loan for turning the house into a bed and breakfast as a father and son project to straighten Frank out. He is haunted by a history of addiction and pedophilia. In the previous action of the play, he got a 12-year-old pregnant. Part of Franz’s mission in resurfacing at the beginning of the play is to apologize, but also to inform his siblings that he endured the worst of their father’s mental instability while his siblings turned their backs on him. Franz is nervous about taking his place in the family, but is sallied forward by River’s urging. He tries to fix things first by getting rid of the photo album, then by retrieving it. Franz seeks redemption in the eyes of his family. “I wanted to fix something! I just wanted to come back,” he says (Appropriate 55). By the end he and Bo fail to
make a true connection. Franz is about to learn that he is going to be a dad, following River’s “plan.” Franz has deep desires and more of a weak will, though he leans on strength from River. His moral stance is in the process of transforming from animal/“amoral” urges for sex and drugs to a more honorable position of wanting to find resolution to the past and finding ways to help others when he can. Franz is compassionate and sensitive, and trying to change. “I’m a different person now!” he tells Toni on two different occasions. “Why won’t you let me be different?” (Appropriate 51). He asks Rhys, “Do I seem different to you?” (Appropriate 43).

Rachael is in her late 40s, wife of Bo and mother to Cassidy and Ainsley. She has been to the house once before and has prior experience with Ray, and is sensitive to how she was treated and spoken about by him in the past as “Bo’s Jew wife.” Yet Rachael, like Bo, has her own opportunistic motives at work as she had hoped to make the errand of cleaning out Ray’s house part of a “Southern History Road Trip” (Appropriate 15) for she and the kids, driving their way back to Brooklyn. She is described by the other characters as both sensitive and annoying. She is a stay at home mom and much of her energy during Appropriate is focused on keeping her kids away from disturbing influences, such as drugs, swearing, disturbing historical photos and Internet predators (including Franz). Rachael has a strong will, voicing her complaints and misgivings about Ray, standing up to Toni’s verbal flogging, and telling Bo they’re leaving early at any cost. She walks away when Toni uses a racial slur against her early in the play, but later speaks her truths that push Toni over the edge toward violence: that Toni is “a crappy mother and a poisonous person and a life-ruiner…” (Appropriate 52). Even though she speaks against Ray and calls out his racism, she also has a strong sense of decorum, exemplified by her aversion to cussing and her sense of propriety around who gets what rooms in the house. By the end
Rachael has gained the self-awareness to articulate that Bo’s family makes her into an “annoying, shrill Chatty Cathy, catty” (*Appropriate* 53) person she doesn’t like, and blames it on his family’s inclination to violence.

River is in her early 20s but looks younger. Her real name is Trisha. She dresses in such a way that makes Bo think she is Native American. River is brand new to the Lafayette crew. She is a vegan chef from Portland and practices Reiki energy work. River has encouraged and coached Franz on how to handle this family interaction, and is full of the 12-step language and ideology characteristic of Alcoholics Anonymous. She’s also pregnant with Franz’s child and tells Toni, but not Franz, during the course of the play—seemingly in a bid for solidarity with the most powerful member of the family. She has a strong will, using an iron fist is inside a velvet glove. She gently moderates the discussion ensuing from Franz’s apology, and asserts Franz’s legal claim to the estate. She is the daughter of lawyers. “This was all part of her plan” (*Appropriate* 56) Franz explains to Bo, demonstrating River’s powers of subtle manipulation. River’s motivations in helping Franz confront his family point to the fact that she is looking for financial stability for their unborn child. She begins the show believing in Franz, hoping that he can make amends to his family while demanding his share of the family’s financial distributions. She ends the show having learned that Franz lied to her about his past relationship and having impregnated an underage minor. Her moral stance is that people can move on from their transgressions, sometimes with the help of a ritual. Her sense of decorum is to ingratiate herself with the family and to meet Toni’s cruelty with patient countermaneuvers.

Rhys is in his late teens. He looks like “a dude” to Franz, presumably meaning a young man. He is the son of Toni and Derek, now divorced. From a young age he witnessed Franz’s
excessive drinking, drug use and erratic behavior. Rhys was expelled from school last fall as a graduating senior for selling his mother’s prescription pills, leading to the death of another student. When the play begins, Rhys has told Toni he’d like to live with his dad and doesn’t seem to want to interact or be around her, despite Toni’s desperate attempts to connect. However over the course of the play, it is revealed that Rhys and Toni have a fierce attachment to one another. When Toni follows through on their secret plan to cancel the estate sale, Rhys celebrates, calling Rachael a “Jew bitch” (*Appropriate* 40). Alone in the evening, Rhys watches gay porn and masturbates. Toni says she forgives Rhys, but he overhears her calling him a “fuck-up” to Bo. He ends the play by rejecting his mother for her hypocrisy, and is one of the only people in the play to genuinely apologize to another person. When Cassidy asks Rhys what he is apologizing for, he barely knows where to begin. “For losing the photos, for hitting your dad?” (*Appropriate* 55). He suggests that in a few years, he and Cassidy can be friends on their own terms, without the toxic baggage of the family.

Cassidy is 13 years old. According to Toni she is “sprouting into quite a pretty young thing.” Cassidy is the daughter of Bo and Rachael, sister of Ainsley, a preteen girl with an interest in science and Instagram. She’s in between a child and a teenager, old enough to be fascinated by Rhys but young enough to play games with her younger brother. Cassidy lets her curiosity lead her through life and is frustrated when adults try to keep things from her. She adds Franz as a friend on Facebook after the funeral, and told him of Ray’s death, leading to Franz’s reappearance. Cassidy is an eavesdropper and a bit of a “klepto” (*Appropriate* 54). She follows Rhys around and others think she may have a crush on him. She seems to not be sure herself why “I’m being so weird,” (*Appropriate* 41).
Ainsley is a rowdy eight or nine year old boy who doesn’t speak, but provides a kinetic presence and a chaotic energy that wears on Rachael. It’s Rachael’s attempt to keep him in one place that leads to the discovery of the photo album. Ainsley is the first to see the pictures; he also discovers the jars and the KKK hood.

4.5 Approach

Before production, I identified the spine action of the play as a family splitting apart, with Franz as the central figure and the opposing force as “Hatred, personified by Toni and Ray’s memory, as his racist artifacts are discovered.” Today I would say Toni herself is the opposing force, because in practice my ideas became more pragmatic. And, while the play is an ensemble piece, I now feel that the spine action is Franz’s search for redemption.

One of the basic questions of the play is “How can we reconcile past wounds to create a unified future?”, and its genius is that it does this in both personal and political realms at the same time. However in rehearsal, I needed to focus on the characters rather than the larger metaphor of our country’s history of slavery. The abstract inquiry, “Is change possible?” became a much more concrete, character-driven version in rehearsal, “Why won’t Toni let Franz be different?” Is it simply that she refuses to see her father as a bigot? Or is it that she cannot let go of her version of reality to face accumulating evidence connecting her to racial violence? The word “forgive” appears several times in the show, and many times it seems to trigger an extreme reaction from Toni, like when she storms out of act one saying “I hope you forgive each other all night long, you bunch of sorry, sorry people!” (Appropriate 28). River muses on the nature of forgiveness when she explains to Toni, “Did you know the root of ‘sorry’ is actually ‘sore’?” (Appropriate 34). Falling on Toni’s deaf
ears, she explains “We acknowledge the reality of each other’s suffering and, by the extension, the universality of suffering…Isn’t that beautiful?” (34).

A ghost story motif threads through the action, from the bondsmen and women buried in the cemetery to the ghost of Ray that could be in the sounds some characters hear. Inviting us into the experience of the play is an extended sound cue that plays in darkness. Per Jacobs-Jenkins’ stage direction it was go on for a surprisingly long time, making the audience wonder what kind of show it is about to see. This period of time to only listen to music before the action begins borrows from opera and classical music, allowing the audience time to adjust from the rhythms of everyday life into the fantastic realm of the performance, and introducing themes they’ll encounter later in the show. The script called for the cicadas to never disappear (*Appropriate* 8).

The language of this piece is contemporary speech, casual and familiar to place *Appropriate* in the right now. There are a range of generational speech patterns represented that help define the ages of the characters and their relationships to one another. There is ample use of profanity by the siblings and Rhys, which intensifies the disagreement and stakes of the situation. It is also distasteful to Rachael, who is trying to protect her children from the ugliness of the world. Rachael then uses profanity herself in a comedic reversal illustrating that she is at the end of her rope. Toni uses a racial slur as a dare to incite Rachael to violence, while supposedly illustrating that she herself is not an anti-Semite. Rhys uses a racial slur to celebrate his mother’s foiling the side of the family he hates, but instead reveals to his mother how much unconscious bigotry he may have absorbed from her. This family knows how to weaponize language, and both revelations and zingers are underscored by rhythm.
I imagined that a proscenium configuration would create a picture window on the Lafayettes’ living room to offer a voyeuristic view of the characters’ actions behind the “fourth wall” realism of the script. I intended to break this convention in our production, similar to the way Jacobs-Jenkins breaks his own convention of realism at key points. In the end, I did not cross this firm proscenium line with entrances through the audience for Franz when he comes back from the lake soaking wet, as I had planned in my preproduction writing. My impulse instead was to streamline the action by having his entrance come as a surprise, rather than having the audience watch him cross through the house and onto the porch.

The overall visual style was proposed as a largely realistic one portraying a historic house in disrepair. Our intention was to create layers of accumulated junk to convey the residence of a borderline hoarder. We imagined dusty windows and corners. Plantation home architecture suggested Greek columns, high ceilings, crown molding, a picture rail, transom windows, and a decorative staircase railing—all in elegant disrepair. We knew that the arc of the visual world was to slowly unfold from chaos to order. The collapse of the house was another strong visual statement, tantamount to a visual effect, communicating destruction over a span of time. In addition to the above discussion of the scenic environment, the floorplan demanded stairs and a landing, a window to break in through, and transom windows for spying. Megan added a half wall defining a mud room. Regarding costumes, my concept for Franz and River was “wild and scruffy.” I saw Bo and Rachael in clean lines to illustrate the rules of their family of crisp “winners.” I thought of Toni and Rhys as unkempt.

I conceptualized of light and sound adding a “spooky potboiler quality.” The act one break-in has moonlight and flashlights contrasting bright morning light in the next scene. In act two, I
imagined a sea of darkness with isolated areas illuminating several frightful interactions “on the wild and spooky ride through the night,” in my preproduction writing. A chandelier broke through the gloom. Act three called for to a “mausoleum” of the deceased’s belongings. I imagined this act to be even more brightly lit, with sweaty tensions rising as the sun grew high in the sky. An even more brightly lit fight scene would lift the play into an expressionistic world for a few moments. Finally, several blackouts in the final section communicate a passage of time, as the house falls apart.

Writing on concept, style, and script analysis created a directorial approach that focused on the significance of the house and the relationships between the characters. My instinct was that the notion of realism held flexibility in *Appropriate*; in preproduction, deviations from it were not troubling for me to reconcile. I didn’t yet realize that the scenework, rather than the expressionistic gestures involving technical elements, held their own off-kilter deviation from realism that would require finetuning. The spine action of the play started out as a depiction of the family as a unit but moved toward two individuals in conflict. The opposing force to Franz’s quest for forgiveness became much more usefully located in Toni than in an idea or a body of history.
5. Design and Production Collaborations

In this chapter I will discuss working relationships with primary designers Megan Macker and AngelMarie Summers, as well as stage manager Meghan Holliday. I describe my collaborations with assistant director Elijah Fisher and dramaturg Kalā Mueller. Finally, I will outline my collaborations with light and sound designers Prof. Larry Larsen and Prof. Hal Logan.

5.1 Scenic design

After her assignment as scenic designer to the show, Megan Macker and I met in May and were able to brainstorm big ideas and establish ground rules for working. I structured the conversation to include each of us sharing our goals for the piece, as well as strengths and weaknesses. Megan expressed her goal as wanting the audience to feel like they had entered a person’s house, and that they could deduce the person from the house. This was a different and exciting affirmation of my scenic goal to have the house be a character. I assured her that there might be times I did not like what she had done, but that did not mean I thought she was untalented or incapable. She said she does not take things personally until the final product. To finish the meeting, I stated my preference that a ground plan would be available seven to ten days before rehearsal started, which she agreed to. We agreed to a few meeting points during the summer, but Megan was unreachable in the summer.

When we reconnected after school started, we touched on trust and communication. She acknowledged her lack of communication over the summer, and said it would not happen again. Our collaboration moved quickly after that: the image research she then shared with me demonstrated a thorough understanding of the plantation architecture and interiors I wanted to portray. We brainstormed on the final scene and rigging ideas she’d started to discuss with Eric
Lyness, our technical director and shop manager. On the first day of rehearsal she had a rough ground plan. Both she and AngelMarie shared presentations at the second rehearsal, and my sense was that they drew the cast in to the world we would be entering, and impressed them with how well thought out our designers’ work was before the actors even stepped into the process. I later brought Megan into rehearsal to talk through the destruction ballet with the cast, who were excited by what was going to be more of an event than they had anticipated.

The next time we met, at the end of week one, Megan had nailed down details on the ground plan and had ideas about what we were by now calling the “destruction ballet,” presenting me with a clear organizational document. We brainstormed about the “nest” around Ray’s chair that had emerged for me in rehearsal. Over the next weeks, she gave me updates on where she was in her progress due to other priorities in her life, and kept communication going. Megan and I pulled furniture together, working off of one another’s instincts in choosing shabby furniture from a variety of periods that complemented the realistic props. Emma Scheve, our properties designer, had sent items for us to use to make the space less clean, but because they were items in a box, when management distributed them about the space, they felt like a teenager’s messy room, not a hoarder’s residence for 30 years. I had mentioned this to Megan, but knew she had plenty to work on and figured she’d seen the same problem in the designer run. I assumed the final set dressing items, glued together, would come into rehearsal as she finished them, sometime between designer run and cue to cue. I see now that she thought after Emma had dropped the items, she was off the hook and could attend to other aspects. At our next production meeting I noted the blurred lines between scenic, props and costume departments to make the set dressing start to come to life, such as my request for shoes piled by the door or coats piled on a
wall mounted coatrack. Designers did not seem to have the global perspective I was asking for with regard to dressing, instead offering a “that’s not my department” attitude.

The next week Megan got sick, and fell behind a bit. When I saw her at the next production meeting, I had to ask for answers to questions that had been in the rehearsal reports. It seemed that they had not read the reports at all. Megan loaded in the set dressing items the next day at cue to cue rehearsal. In the next two days, relations between the two of us suffered (see “Tech/ Performance”). On the night before opening, I attempted to bring about an honest conversation that would put our relationship back on track. I think we were able to understand each others’ points of view a little better, and some of the hurt feelings were addressed. When we went back into rehearsal, we continued to work and Megan had a great idea about the destruction ballet. I wrote her one more question via email, but she never wrote back, and we did not speak again as collaborators. I know she was happy with the end product, and about the positive feedback she received from the KCACTF respondents. I supported the suggestion to give her a certificate of meritorious achievement for scenic design. Read more about our collaboration during the tech process in “Tech/performance.”

5.2 Costume Design

When we met in the summer, AngelMarie’s first reactions to the play were largely negative but upon talking with her further, I realized this was because of the play’s truthfulness. She had trouble relating to the characters, yet she recognized all of the characters. She shared terrific insight into the play and suggested contacting Dr. Gaudino (see “Outreach Part 1”) to tap her expertise. When school resumed, we reconnected by looking at images I was preparing for my
presentation to the cast, including some portrait and abstract imagery I had pulled specifically to share ideas with her about character. It was a good re-introduction to the play, and I could see her wheels turning. AngelMarie quickly began sending me early drafts of her costume presentation ideas. Some points where she and I were still fuzzy were the look of the KKK hood (Jacobs-Jenkins describes it as a pillowcase) and the degree of Toni’s disregard for her appearance. At the design presentations on our second night of rehearsal, AngelMarie was inspired by Kalā’s dramaturgy presentation to weave in the rapper J. Cole as a graphic on Rhys’ shirt.

AngelMarie began her fittings with the cast, which were unusual in that she not only collected measurements but sounded out each actor about his thoughts on the character and what he might wear. She made it clear she did not want to put anyone in something they hated, and would be working with them to construct the look of the character together. I was surprised by the degree of self-assurance AngelMarie showed in her commitment to this more complicated route, but supported her holistic approach. At many points in the process, AngelMarie was self-sufficient in making decisions and moving the process forward until our next touchpoint.

When she shared her next draft of her costume presentation with me, I could see in the notes field of her powerpoint a record of the extensive conversations she’d had with the actors. Within this same timeframe I was having character conferences with the actors, and it was fascinating to see ideas I recognized from our character conferences in addition to character information that was uniquely emergent in their meetings with AngelMarie. I also noticed her notes on things the actor had said to me but I had not fully taken in, wrapped up as I was in my own agenda. I could now see these ideas with fresh eyes in AngelMarie’s notes. It struck me how we tend to only accept information that reinforces our own point of view, and that in reality any
play is a Venn diagram of where the team’s perspectives overlap. If I can expand my field of awareness, I realized, I can take in more about what my collaborators see, feel and notice.

AngelMarie went above and beyond by putting actors in costume for the designer run, during which I was happy to see that she seemed to be very engaged as an audience member. We had a meeting the next day to go through my notes, and the only major adjustment was Rachael’s first outfit. I was really happy with the costume trajectory of Toni, which we had gone back and forth on in her research phase. AngelMarie’s treatment of Cassidy was hipper and funnier than what I had imagined. Her work on Bo, River and Franz also had a great sense of humor and verisimilitude. I had a number of very small adjustments and questions—such as trim for Franz’s shirt or shoulder cutouts for Cassidy’s last shirt—which AngelMarie was very receptive to. For all of her preparation, she was agile with adjustments, yet stood her ground when moved to do so. I sensed her artistic integrity and trusted it.

AngelMarie then stepped out of the production process due to an injury, so it was so lucky that she was so far ahead. When she rejoined the show, she added her makeup and hair design to the actors. Only small adjustments were needed, like dialing Toni’s age makeup and Ainsley’s rosy cheeks back. I sensed her irritation over feeling like she was not given adequate time with makeup. I also felt it necessary to balance a line between the actor call, fight call, what in the professional world is realistically called “half hour,” and any notes I would try to implement before opening. I felt our collaboration was strong until fraught nerves got in the way at the end.

5.3 Stage Management

Meghan and I met the day before rehearsals started to go over the project overview and to discuss what I wanted from stage management (SM). It was her first time as an SM, so I created
a document with guidelines that outlined my preferences in terms of starting rehearsals on time, rehearsal rituals, the warmup, break schedules, rehearsal reports and scheduling. I discussed with her how I view the two most valuable qualities of the SM: the ability to be proactive in spotting and counteracting logistical obstacles before I do, and the ability to hold the room with evenness and calm in the midst of what can be the chaotic process we know as theater-making. Meghan took in a ton of information and asked good questions. We discussed some aspects of the tech process and her oversight of the ASM, and I gave her an overview of the outreach aspects of the production.

Meghan’s stewardship added energy and supportive scaffolding to our process. She always arrived early to make sure the room was ready and patiently worked through every discussion point for the rehearsal report with me after rehearsal, making careful notes. We brainstormed on design and management questions. Her learning curve throughout the process was evident, but she remained transparent and graceful if I pointed out an error. Her supportive and inquisitive spirit fueled smooth run throughs, as she and the ASM carefully engineered prop travel and furniture moves. Even at the moments when the number of moving parts within the process seemed overwhelming, she outwardly maintained a “one thing at a time” competency that built trust for everyone in the room. Meghan began the tech part of the process by paying close attention and asking lots of questions as she wrote cues in paper tech. She ventured further into tech, gaining confidence as she ran our cue to cue rehearsal. She learned the complicated calling of the destruction ballet and was effectively fully in charge of the destruction ballet in the final scene. She and I worked to finetune this complicated cueing to find an optimal timing. I gave Meghan the most notes of anyone once we were open, and she continued to incorporate changes
while managing the actors.

5.4 Assistant Direction

Assistant director Elijah Fisher functioned in several roles throughout the process of

*Appropriate*, not least of which was as a thinking partner for me. Elijah was involved in nearly every aspect of the process, and in doing so had all of the same information I did. I was able to use his depth of understanding as a trusted second set of eyes to aid in decisionmaking processes and ask for a second opinion on what I was perceiving.

At the outset of the project, Elijah agreed to act as the fight captain, lead warmups, act as point person for the outreach activities, and attend rehearsal. We worked together on formulating outreach plans throughout the summer and he was instrumental in connecting Brandon Rivera (see “Outreach Part 1”) to the project, as well as setting up logistical details for the learning event taught by Lisa Grady-Willis. Elijah was generous about taking on a number of communications to our contacts and executed them with acumen and grace. Additionally, he observed me as choreographer on a professional show over the summer to see how I lead cast warmups to start rehearsal. He then formulated his own warmup and taught it to me. I gave him a few suggestions, which he incorporated in addition to adding a vocal warmup. Before rehearsal started, we went over all of the scene divisions and beat titles I’d created and discussed the high points of the script.

When rehearsals began, Elijah communicated information to the cast about upcoming outreach activities and led warmups at the beginning of rehearsal whenever possible. From the first time he taught his warmup to the cast, he gained total peer buy in. The warmup was something we all looked forward to and laughed through due to its infectious silliness. He also
ran fight call with careful attention. Behind the scenes, he and I were in near constant communication around keeping our outreach details and logistics on schedule. Elijah was also in rehearsal and made himself available to me on breaks to bounce ideas back and forth. He was honest but encouraging about the work as it unfolded, and always generous with giving positive feedback to the team in our rehearsal rituals. A few times in rehearsal he was able to take actors into a separate space to work with them on a scene, but unfortunately I wasn’t able to utilize this option as much as I would have liked due to my limited bandwidth in planning. I see the value of a proactive or hungry assistant director looking for opportunities to work outside the room that a preoccupied director would not see, but Elijah was perhaps more valuable as a co-pilot.

Elijah’s work is further detailed throughout the “Outreach, Part 2” chapter, which describes his involvement in the student moderation team creating the post-show discussion. Elijah used a diverse skillset throughout our process and kept a high standard of excellence during periods of high demand. Undeniably, he occupied a unique position with another layer of pressure as the production team’s only African American and often my first “pulsecheck” on interpreting and communicating about racial content. After *Appropriate* concluded, Elijah remarked that he had brought his own willingness to be comfortable being uncomfortable—both in regard to race and in regard to working hard, when so much fell on his shoulders toward the end of the show’s run.

### 5.5 Dramaturgy

Kalā and I researched and discussed *Appropriate* throughout the summer, met and exchanged ideas during rehearsal, and worked together to formulate Kalā’s lobby exhibit, *The Voices of Minorities at UP*. We began by creating a research plan, which was a list of questions and areas of historical, cultural, and psychological terrain that *Appropriate* bumps up against (see above
Kalā and I both wanted to better educate ourselves on the historical and cultural factors that caused Jacobs-Jenkins to write the play, and were interested in educating ourselves and the cast as part of the experience of doing the show. We divided up these areas of inquiry between us, and shared information with one another throughout a series of meetings over the summer. We slowly ventured into scholastic research, but our discussions of the play were always enlightening. Kalā’s depth of analysis was often impressive and informed my point of view as we shared interpretations of the family history and entrenched dynamics of the characters. He could see things I couldn’t sometimes: for instance, that Rhys is speaking of an offstage conversation about cancelling the estate sale when he says to Toni in act two, “Did you do it?”

Once school started, Kalā began pulling all of our compiled information into a presentation for the actors, making big leaps with compiling relevant information. At this point he let me know that he was concerned about whether actors would be able to commit to the show and to the unsympathetic characters they would play. During this conversation I watched him on FaceTime as he paced in a circle around his room, the background blurring past. My stomach did a few back flips at the prospect that my fears regarding the difficult material were confirmed by this trusted collaborator. I thanked him for telling me, and asked Kalā if he would be willing to speak to the cast about his concerns. I thought it would be much more powerful for the cast to hear an appeal to step up to this material from a peer, rather than an authority figure. He agreed, and concluded his very strong dramaturgy presentation on day two with a firm but inspiring challenge to his classmates to take *Appropriate* on with full commitment. The students responded favorably, and a few mentioned both aspects of his presentation as something that had
impacted them as we concluded our rehearsal ritual that night. Additionally, Kalā showed a lot of sensitivity around handling the historical reference photos of lynchings, and I think it was powerful for the (white) cast to hear from he and Elijah (as POCs and friends) several times throughout the process, “It’s ok to be uncomfortable. I’m uncomfortable, too, but this is important.” Kalā later distributed his presentation electronically to the actors for their reference.

During the rehearsal process Kalā gave astute notes that fell somewhere between directing and storytelling/script interpretation questions. When I got bogged down in minutiae, Kalā was able to articulate the big ideas that were not yet working, culminating in the designer run at which we were able to see where the real challenges would lie. In our second week, Kalā pulled me aside and shared feelings of being caught between the two worlds in *Appropriate* as a Hawaiian Swiss man, and feeling that he did not belong to either of them. I thanked him for sharing with me. Standing in the empty lobby, I could not help but feel like this was the perfect opportunity to turn his experience into the lobby exhibit. I asked, “What if you turned this space into your questions?”

*The Voices of Minorities at UP* (see Appendix A) was the perfect way to expand his questions of inclusion to mixed-race and intersectional people, and localize it at the University of Portland campus. Kalā’s exhibit grounded the play’s ideas in the community we are all a part of. Late in rehearsal I realized we could have used more dramaturgical information on a couple of areas (see “Auditions/Casting/Rehearsal”), but Kalā was absorbed with constructing his lobby display, so I collected information on my own.

### 5.6 Lighting Design

Prof. Larry Larsen and I bounced ideas via email until we could find time to meet in person,
when his main question was about how I saw the realistic play fitting with the final scene. From my point of view, heightening the fight scene into nonrealism through light and sound elements (bright white lighting, a faint buzzing that grows in volume) would help bridge the two contrasting worlds of realism and expressionism. I also felt the extended cicada sound cues bookending the show would add offputting, nonrealistic accents which give the audience cues that reality was slightly off-kilter. Larsen did not seem convinced by my ideas. We grappled over what a realistic world looks like: I hate lighting washes, but that is what the world of the play seems to suggest. Where my first instinct would be to break up these washes with moments of isolation, Larry suggested bringing theatricality into the production through use of color, which I would never have thought of. He mentioned the use of “oppressive down light,” which gave me hope for something more sculpted than general, and he was open to the bright white over-realism of the fight. We both had a lot to say and it was hard to hear each other at times. He had questions about the chandelier and how we would use it, which was a good catalyst for me to start tracking it in staging and to use it more than I’d planned to; I hate stage elements that are only used once.

After viewing the designer run, Prof. Larsen’s only questions for me were about the lamp in act two—he apparently did not understand the joke we were going for from the acting. Similarly he did not notice in cue to cue that the actors were playing downstage windows which did not match up with the ones he had hung. Prof. Larsen’s cue changes in the cue to cue rehearsal were sometimes so subtle I could barely detect them (see “Tech/Performance”), but I enjoyed continuing to integrate several changes with him in our final week, when the bulk of our work as collaborators occurred. One late breaking idea was to use the chandelier much more in
the destruction ballet than we had first envisioned it, and though it was out of the realm of reality (there would be no electricity to the house after the house is deserted), the flickering chandelier added to the final scene in a major way. Overall I was happy with the visual world created through lighting, and felt Prof. Larsen and I enjoyed a satisfying collaborative dialogue.

5.7 Sound Design

Prof. Hal Logan and I were in close communication throughout the process, and sound cues were created in continuous stages leading up to opening. We began by going through the cues in the script, playing special attention to the two major cicada cues and how they would be different from one another. Through our dialogue, the idea of the first cicada cue emerged as a Philip Glass-inspired, rhythmic piece. In contrast, I invited Prof. Logan’s drumming skill as a layer on top of the second cicada cue, in what I imagined to be a dense sound event leading into the storm in the final scene. He mentioned the soundtrack to the movie *Birdman* as a point of inspiration, which tickled me. I confirmed that I wanted cicada sounds to be constant throughout the play, which produced a third contrasting aural idea of a marshy, wetland soundscape as preshow sound. Prof. Logan was game to create sound during the fight that would move from subliminal to annoying to alarming. Prof. Logan sent drafts of sound cues when he was ready for input from me, which came mostly in the form of addressing energetic build and length. I was happy with his aesthetic choices and production execution.

One artistic quagmire came in trying to fulfill Prof. Logan’s stated desire for live sound wherever possible. When I found out that we were forbidden from using candy glass, I had suggested using a crashbox for the broken window sound in the destruction ballet. Prof. Logan was not familiar with how he might use a crashbox and communication between he and our shop
manager was not adequate. I somehow got trapped in the middle of an absurd line of questioning about where to find broken glass to put into the crashbox over our tech weekend.

The paper tech process brought out the different ways we were thinking of light and sound in the destruction ballet, and while I understood Prof. Logan’s issues with cueing, I was not clear on how to fix them (see “Tech/Performance”). Issues with the phone porn sound cue used in Rhys’ masturbation scene only became apparent in tech and were difficult to solve, though Prof. Logan worked with me good-naturedly to find a cue that would be instantly recognizable as gay porn within three seconds. This was something of a “name that tune” challenge that became impossible to fix definitively, but we worked to improve it past opening night.
6. Auditions/Casting/Rehearsal

On the second day of fall semester 2017, the *Appropriate* production process began. In this chapter I will discuss the work of moving from auditions and casting through three major phases of the rehearsal process leading up to technical rehearsals. Phase one spanned from table work to our first stumble through off book. In phase two, I identified blocking problems and acting challenges. In phase three, I employed strategies to address these roadblocks.

6.1 Auditions and Casting

I wrote the audition notice carefully, pinpointing the play’s critique of white privilege and including a picture of the playwright in an attempt to intercept false impressions like those I’d already encountered. After our first night of monologues, I was able to begin creating the world of the play by bringing in Kristin Mun, the fight choreographer, to callbacks. By the end, all of the auditioning actors had tasted the brutality inherent in the play. On the second night of callbacks I saw scenes in 10 minute slots, which was enough time to try an adjustment to their first read. Certain actors, such as Brandon, surprised me—he had a depth of emotion I had not anticipated. The most difficult scene to audition was Bo’s final moments alone as he looks at the house and breaks down crying, when Rachael comes in and asks him what’s wrong. I felt terrible asking actors to pull this kind of emotion up in an audition, but I needed to know if the actor would have the chutzpah to go for it. Overall, I was profoundly relieved to hear the material playing well through the young actors with the briefest of impressions of the show, and to hear the humor coming through.

Due to the company casting process at University of Portland, I negotiated with two other directors in the fall semester for the actors I wanted to cast. Since actors are only allowed to do
one show, we are required to have up to three or more casting options per role. I had a lot of conflicting feelings, but felt like I had choices that could work in different configurations. The men were a major consideration, because with three different shows casting from a limited pool of men, they rapidly became my second, third, and fourth choices for each other’s roles—which created a mess for the semblance of age ranges I was hoping to portray. One actress had given a terrific audition as River, but did not convey racial ambiguity. Rebby’s audition was fantastic in a different way, and I had confirmed at the audition that she felt ok about playing white as a Chinese woman.

I was truly happy with the cast I came away with, particularly Joe, who was the only Rhys I wanted to consider, and Emma, as I felt she was the only woman in our department who could truly carry the role.

6.2 Rehearsal phase 1

There were many things I wanted to happen “first thing” in the Appropriate process. Diving into the difficult content with an exercise, first read through, director/designer presentations, rehearsal ritual and warmup, and individual character conferences were all mechanisms I believed would front load our process with keys for building trust and an environment of shared discovery. Looking back, it’s clear that endowing the cast with information and stimulation early paid off in the later phases of the process.

Highlights from the early rehearsals included several introductory explorations. One was an exercise I had picked up at ATHE from Martine Kei Green-Rogers. I felt this exercise captured part of the play’s essence and would reveal participants’ feelings about race and privilege with laser-like precision. I passed out blank index cards and asked each person to write
down the first time they remember ever becoming aware of their own race. We all wrote in silence, and after a few minutes I collected and read them. The responses were astonishing and revealing. One read:

It was in 1st grade. There was a native American pow-wow presentation assembly thing. There was an announcement about it in class, and some kids were excused to go practice because they were Native American and participating in it. I asked if I was Native American. I was told I wasn’t, and that I would have known if I was. So I guess that’s when I realized I was nothing but white.

This expression of racelessness (“nothing but white”) was echoed by others:

Honestly, I think it was after I had conversations with friends at school about being “white” and specifically “just white.” It was a confusing and weird realization.

Others reflected an elder specifically informing them:

When my dad told me…I was probably like 4 or so.
When I was a kid and my grandma explained that even though my skin is white, I still have a hispanic heritage that I needed to appreciate and understand.

Some responses reflected a shifting identity of race:

…The moment I stepped off of the plane in my mother’s country. I realized I didn’t and don’t know what race I am.

Me, my roommate, and Chastin Kekahuna were the only Hawaiian kids in Corrado [a dorm], and people thought I was brown, and not white here.

I found one response disturbing, and indicative of the underbelly of the play:

1st grade: was explained as to why I was infected with lice while attending a low-income minority school.

A pall had come over the room by the time all of the responses had been read. I explained that as the exercise had been explained to me, it became clear that many white students had not been made aware of their race until later on in childhood, whereas by contrast many people of color have an experience in which their race, along with its societal implications, is made clear to them very early on in life. I offered that for white people, it is worthwhile to consider and look at this lack of awareness as part of one’s privilege in being part of the dominant/powerful segment of
society. I closed with the definition of white fragility as coined by Robin DiAngelo (see “Outreach, Part 1”) and invited them to notice the warning signs in themselves. The exercise was effective—perhaps too effective—in communicating that this process was going to be personal and at times, sobering in its implication of ourselves.

Reading the play aloud then yielded many laughs which came as a welcome relief to the tension. The students remarked on the lack of resolution, and turned to the final imagery in looking for answers. Megan pointed out that the final stage directions say “thirteen years from now, twenty-six years from now” as though Jacobs-Jenkins is conveying the passage of time into the future from the point of view of the cicadas. I had not picked this up, and we were all blown away by the idea of a nonhuman standpoint on time. By the end of the night I remembered to tell the cast how happy I was to be working with each of them, and made light of how heavy the evening had started off.

Out of all of our design presentations, several actors commented to me about the impact Kalā’s dramaturgy presentation had on them. One reason was that it was clear how much thought and work had been put into the process before the actors set foot in the room. Another reason is that Kalā handled difficult material with compassion and candor. He began with a disclaimer that the material discussed may make people uncomfortable, and assured them that this was ok. His presentation discussed Oregon’s racist constitutional items and the University’s sometimes faulty attempts at inclusion, as well as an overview of the Reconstruction period in American history and how increased legal standing for freed slaves and other African Americans gave way to the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. He zoned in on the play’s plantation location and the phenomenon of lynching. This last piece of American history is the most difficult to inhabit. We discussed
lymphing “souvenirs” and what lynchings were like as events. He introduced the book *Without Sanctuary* and passed it around for people to choose to look at or not. The book made its way slowly around the table as Kalā spoke, sometimes drawing tears. After touching on Alcoholics Anonymous and the 12 steps, he wrapped up with quotes from the rapper J. Cole and put Jacobs-Jenkins’ messages into his own words. Kalā took off his dramaturg’s hat to finish with a personal appeal to the actors, asking them to not back off from the material out of fear. He spoke directly about the previous year’s production of *Good Kids* by Naomi Iitzuka, which dealt with date rape in a high school. Moreover, he issued a challenge to the cast to bring their bravest work to this process due to the importance of the play.

The purpose of my director’s presentation was to share my personal connection to the play, as well as why I thought it was important. I started with my elementary school experience (see “Research”) and how that related to my index card story on becoming aware of my race for the first time. I spoke about subjects I felt the students were not likely to have life experience with, starting with the tenderness of the first year after the death of a parent, and the punishing nature of caregiving for elders. I spoke about how much strain familial, especially sibling relationships, can undergo during the long term illness of a family member. I spoke about the estate sale we had in which I saw my childhood for sale in a promotional email. I spoke about the effect of addiction on families, as well as my own experience with Anonymous programs. It felt like a lot of personal information, but I had carefully considered what I would and would not share and how to swiftly move through it.

Rehearsal routines were put in place which functioned as the scaffolding of our process. Elijah’s physical and vocal warmup (see “Design and Production Collaborations”) shifted the
students’ attention away from the worries of their day and into a creative and receptive state. We also used a simple rehearsal ritual that I have been using in all of my director led processes for the last several years. At the beginning of rehearsal each person names one thing from their lives they wish to “set aside” for the duration of rehearsal, while we focus on the play. At the end of rehearsal each person names one thing from rehearsal they want to “take out” into their lives. This gives me a daily reading on what’s going on in each person’s life individually, and what’s impacting them about the process.

Character conferences with each actor gave me a chance to connect with each individual outside of the group dynamics of the rehearsal room. I used that time to inquire into the person’s motivating purpose in doing the play as well as to seed the ground for co-creation of character. The most dramatically successful one-on-one was with Sammie, in which we talked about the difference between knowing and understanding, and how that might relate to Cassidy as a digital native and her relationship to social media. Eventually we arrived at the idea that Cassidy has infinite access to bits of information, but her true search—her through line in the play—is to connect these dots into a meaningful network of understanding. This idea made Sammie visibly light up with excitement, and it became a touchpoint between the two of us.

As I began staging, I engaged the actors in Socratic dialogue in order to find out and encourage their formation of intention and action. I noticed immediately that exposing the actor’s thought process often yielded what I considered to be a low stakes choice, so my challenge was to avoid negating their first responses, while offering something I thought was more useful to the scene.

I considered it part of my challenge to myself to work from textually driven actor intention,
and let their impulses guide the staging instead of my compositional preferences. For the choreographer in me, it was freeing and unnerving to come to rehearsal without hours of preparation on how I wanted them to move. For the director in me, it represented a decision to believe that showing up and being me, rather than arming myself with the perfection of the ideas I would present, was what would serve the process best. This was a new way of working for me, and with it I embraced my own vulnerability in hopes that would be mirrored back to me.

Early notable moments in rehearsal came from pursuing the nonverbal life of the scenes and characters when being on-book was getting in the way. Working the first scene, I had them all drop their scripts and asked Emma to silently go after Brandon physically, while he tried to escape and Rebby and Joe reacted off of each move. When they did this, the menace of her desire to hurt him and his skittish, confused attempt to avoid and escape (but not leave) in reaction became abundantly clear. Mun’s choreography had a similar “bridge effect,” and germinated the seed of what the actors had experienced with her in the callbacks.

Our first fight choreography session emphasized the cruelty and rage it takes to enact violence and the fearful violation of receiving it. As Mun set the final moments of the fight, I saw a moment of genuine astonishment on Kaylie’s face when Sammie interrupted her, having completely lost herself in the act of terrorizing the Lafayettes. When the entire sequence had been choreographed and Patrick committed to his cry that stops the melee, a chill ran through the room. The actors stopped and looked around at him, breathing hard and listening to his shrill wail piercing the space. Mun, Elijah and I looked at each other as if we had seen a ghost.

In a fast-and-dirty attempt at a type of mask work, I used painter’s tape to giving the cast a starting place from which to distinguish the ages of the characters. For Emma I put it on the
outsides of her thighs, like saddlebags. For Brandon I put it across the back of his shoulders, like a heavy yoke that would slouch his shoulders. For Pat I put it on his stomach, like a middle aged paunch. For Sammie I put it horizontally on her back, where a new bra would encircle the ribcage. I had them develop their experience of the tape from a standing neutral position on stage, and then slowly had them bring this awareness to walking and dealing with one another onstage nonverbally. Although it was about 10 minutes of rehearsal, the students were responsive and several verbalized its impact later in the process. Another physical shortcut which emerged was planting little moments of violence for Emma, such as asking her to kick the wall in order to start off a speech with the attack I wanted. I also set her fist pounding first softly, then with increasing force against a wall to reinforce repetitions in the language. Without knowing it at the beginning, I later saw how they led up to and supported Emma starting the fight (there was even a third echo the actors added later between Emma and Joe, which suggested the cycle of violence would continue in their family line).

Meanwhile, the processes surrounding rehearsal served to support our artistic risktaking. Kalā began giving me notes outside of rehearsal, which then helped to focus my work on the issues where we agreed the most clarification was needed. Elijah worked in the lobby a few times with actors who had been called but weren’t being used at the moment, and began to chime in both in rehearsal with actors and outside with me as we discussed what we were seeing.

Around this point in the process Prof. Golla’s notes about style in my preproduction writing came back to me (see “Style/Script Analysis/Approach”). As press about the show began to show up in The Beacon, Elijah was able to make contact with the Black Student Union and the idea of people of color watching this play started to become real to me. I knew that Rachael
and River were the voices who oppose racism in the play, and I knew that I wanted those voices to cut through the pile of obfuscation created by the Lafayette family. I began to see that the job of the family was to, if not be racist themselves, then to be apathetic to or indifferent to racism. This indifference needed to be a bigger obstacle in order to create a need for Rachael’s, and later River’s, protests to slice through it. So everything needed to be larger than life in order for this passivity around racial inequity to be apparent. This is one of the turning points in the process where my urging for performance size outweighed my consciousness of maintaining authentic listening and responding.

As we plowed through the rough block I began to notice that actors were often caught speaking upstage to their scene partners, and simply asking them to take a line downstage did not help. My impulse to bring the actor with a speech or big moment downstage was continually ruined by his or her need to look at the person he or she was talking to. I attempted to continue on, not wanting to squash them completely or stop and make them do it over repetitiously. I figured I would think about it, along with all of the “organic” and at times problematic blocking, as we wound up a first draft of the show.

In addition to upstaging, another aspect of the show began to drive me crazy, which was starting to feel stuck in a boring living room play. Though scenic changes between acts are suggested in the script of *Appropriate*, a video interview with Jacobs-Jenkins about another show led to my more radical conceptualizaton to create three totally different living room arrangements. This would break up the progress of the play visually, and give me three different sets to play on. It would also disrupt audience expectations in a way that supported the postmodern aspects of the show by offering a multiplicity of views of the same space. After
completely rearranging the furniture for act two, I began to watch the actors’ physical interactions in a new way: suddenly, I could begin to see their spacial relationships telling the story. It was not that the new floorplan was empirically better, it was that shifting the object of my frustration and looking at it from another angle unlocked new ideas. I was able to re-engage with staging in a way that felt intriguing, combining compositional elements with my inquiry into “behavior we only do at home,” like putting feet on furniture or wiping dirty hands on a couch.

Emma exhibited leadership by getting off book on large sections of scenes well before the off book dates, jolting her fellow cast members into action. As the actor with the biggest role, this sent a strong message to everyone. While the upstaging issues throughout the show were apparent, emotions were coming easily. Perhaps because of the fight, the actors were well prepared for where they were building to. Once we were able to seat the fight in the surrounding action, the devastation in act three came readily.

6.3 Rehearsal phase 2

As the scenework began to come together, I came to terms with the problems my early staging choices had created. This also marked a turning point after which the show would take the largest leaps of the process.

Following our designer run, I had a meeting with Prof. Golla at which he gave me notes, and I was able to articulate the aspects of the production I wanted his help with. Many of my problems were about relieving the upstaging issues, so we first talked through staging solutions for portraying realism in proscenium configuration. These included:

- Put the speaker up center, talking to listeners in the downstage left and right corners. He
also expressed this as “if the person speaking is more center than the listener, the listener needs to move downstage.” This seemed hard for an actor to notice in the moment, so I thought of the floor plan as a trapezoid, where the speaker needed to be on the upstage parallel and the listeners in the downstage corners. This later contributed to a different problem of pushing the actors to the edges of the room for much of the scenes, but it helped to solve the problem I was having.

• For longer speeches, work on the listeners. Is the speaker looking for specific reactions from specific people when speaking to more than one person? How does she know when she’s getting closer to her objective? What are the listeners doing/not doing to activate the speaker?
• Find ways to motivate movement with scenic/prop elements. Going for a drink, or other prop can help to create a new stage picture.
• Use false exits to help break up static situations.
• Use the upper level of the stair landing when possible.

Helpfully, we discussed how artificial the staging in a proscenium theater actually needs to be, as opposed to thrust or arena configuration, in which most audience members can observe a satisfying composition most of the time. In proscenium, I started to realize, you had to find reasons—handy “tricks,” we joked—that would create viable excuses to orient actors 45 or 90 degrees downstage from their default positions in profile. I was ready to admit I knew none of these tricks, though I recognized them when they were named and had been watching them for years. It was that I personally could not speak the grammar of realism in proscenium yet.

Complicating matters, we explored the necessity to use a light touch for discovery of and reinforcement of blocking in realism, so that the particularity of the style can come to life. Over-controlling or rerunning the scene too much would be damaging, and a degree of play within the determined choices kept the scene alive, although variable.

Objectives in the (multiple) longer speeches throughout the show needed to be clarified in order to focus the ranginess of the script. Additionally, Prof. Golla suggested setting a loose choreography of moves for a monologue like Franz’s when he is explaining how he threw the photo album in the lake. Ironically, I had started with this, then thrown it out the second time we
worked the scene. Brandon had seemed rather lost when I took away the choreography, and couldn’t remember his lines, which were previously memorized.

We also analyzed some of the challenges for Bo’s character, one of which was to make him less unlikeable. Prof. Golla suggested adding loving touches from family members, which in practice not only accomplished its objective, but also highlighted Toni’s loneliness. Prof. Golla talked through an outside-in approach to emotional preparation, which involved planting imagined physiological responses into a scene. A final “trick” we explored was turning Bo upstage to hide Pat’s ability or inability to cry on cue for the final scene on any given night.

Poor diction was having a negative impact on the understandability of the language throughout the show. Perhaps I had contributed to creating this monster through my emphasis on wanting the show to “fly.” The young actors rushed through dialogue unless I specifically told them to stop or insert a pause. It was like pulling the emergency brake while they were speeding down the freeway. This is an example of how my ideas about tempo lacked specificity and intention, as discussed below.

6.4 Rehearsal phase 3

Next, I set about revising the blocking to create a new draft of the show, bouncing ideas with Elijah behind the table. Although it was confusing for the actors in moments, by and large the cast expressed feelings of satisfaction and progress as we troubleshot our way through the show.

Acting work was largely centered on deepening the work of the three siblings. Emma worked hard on her diction and asked Prof. Mindi Logan for help with finding the drunkenness Toni experiences in act two. For Pat and Brandon, I set aside private time with each of them to work on their challenging moments. With Pat I utilized the physiological response exercise
combined with a set of physical actions for him to follow. He was hungry to have some kind of emotional and physical reference to hold on to in this moment. For Franz’s big monologue, I moved the listeners to stay downstage left, but picked out specific lines that would be directed to specific members of his family, moving from Rhys to Toni and Bo, and ending with River. I gave individual family members specific moves on specific lines of Brandon’s to help pull out their individual reactions to him. I also gave Brandon a rough physical choreography to follow throughout which moved him around the stage, as an allusion to the all-night adventure he had just been on.

In the final leg of the rehearsal process, I returned to act three to fix the mess I had made in fixing Franz’s big monologue. The cast had quixotically ended up in a line around the time that Rachael calls Cassidy downstairs to uncover how she and Franz met online, which was a delightfully warped way to push the boundaries of the style. Compounding the success I’d found with pulling out certain lines to certain people in the monologues, I suddenly identified how maliciously Rachael was addressing “the two monsters you’ve raised” to Toni in her final provocation before violence erupted. Adjusting the blocking so that Kaylie could pointedly refer to Joe and Brandon as the “fuckups” Toni is responsible for markedly increased the stakes of the insults she is dealing to Toni.

As the clock wound down toward our cue to cue rehearsal, I returned to act one to work on clarifying the multiple major speeches of Toni and their effect on the rest of the characters. Finding the differences for each beat was incredibly difficult, and the adjustments we made were hard won victories. We’d found subtle shifts between beats for Toni, from humiliating to annihilating to driving out first Bo and then Franz, but these shades were all very close in hue.
Even I had a hard time identifying the differences in what these tactic shifts could look like. We were able to find a different color with the speech in which Toni defends her dad and his professional path to becoming a Supreme Court Justice, challenging her brothers to provide her with evidence of his racism they specifically remembered. We also articulated a nice progression in the way she reacts to Franz’s letter, craftily cross-examining Franz until she ends up terrorizing him with shame and blame. After this point Bo asks Toni if she has lost her mind. Giving Emma direction to kick the wall in order to jumpstart the speech, and asking her to “lose her mind,” put her a bit at a distance, she told me later, because she felt that I was judging her character, and she sympathized so deeply with Toni.

Regarding pace, I have a received understanding that pushing for pace too early will destroy the reality of your play, so I planned to address it in our final tech run before dress rehearsal. I see now that not attending to tempo more transparently from the beginning of scene work set us up badly. I did want the language in the show to come very fast, depicting reactive overeducated smartasses bouncing off each other. But “mostly fast” is not a consideration of the pace of a play, of the hills and valleys a two-hour experience can benefit from. Moreover, relentless pace can exhaust an audience where tempo shifts, while creating length, make the play feel new each time, re-engaging the audience so that they do not notice time. “Mostly fast” really comes from my fear that the audience will lose interest, rather than confidence in crafting an experience that will be absorbing.

When I did attend to pace with a speed through, some actors stopped listening and started pushing in certain sections of the play. Here was the most obvious example of what would come in my feedback later, regarding listening and responding. Conversely, one of the most difficult
sections for pace was the Toni/Bo scene in act two in which they reminisce about their childhood. The energy would die as soon as Emma and Pat reclined in the chairs talking about old times. Clearly this section of the play was something of an eddy in the rushing river of *Appropriate*, and I might have done well to approach the tempo as intentionally different from the rest of the show.

Prof. Golla and I discussed strategies for success in working with student actors. One thing I was noticing was that some actors would try to take a note, but the execution was mechanical. If I tried to then adjust the forced behavior, the actor could become even more mannered. Rather than readjusting again, I saw what I really needed to do was identify what the actor did not understand about what I had asked. Moreover, Prof. Golla and I discussed the fallacy some young actors hold that what is comfortable for the actor onstage equals truthful behavior. Often, actors working outside of their comfort zones say “It feels weird,” or “This doesn’t feel natural,” not understanding that those feelings aren’t necessarily an indication of bad acting or blocking. I felt a need to get the actors out of their comfort zones of in order to turn up the volume on the characters’ apathy and unawareness to suit the style of the play’s writing. The size of the characters the actors and I cultivated together was larger than most of them were comfortable with initially; finding this breadth of extension was shaky ground for some. In retrospect, I see how I put all of the emphasis on extending them bigger and more specifically than they had worked before, and did not place a complementary value on receiving one another.

Over the course of the four week rehearsal period, the *Appropriate* cast went from a newly assembled group of college students looking at photos of lynchings together, to a wiser, braver
ensemble of actors capable of bold characterizations and deft revision. Strong casting choices and time spent building trust in the rehearsal room, as well as palpable support from design and production personnel, contributed to this cohesion. The strength of the ensemble allowed me as director the flexibility to experiment, make mistakes, and correct errors without eroding the actors’ faith in their process.
7. Outreach, Part 2

Congruent to the rehearsal process, Elijah and I coordinated outreach activities for cast members and what became, in light of Jones’ open invitation, the self-selected student moderation team for the talkback discussions. Many of these outreach activities occurred on days off from our five day per week rehearsal schedule, making for a packed and immersive process for participants moving from creative exploration onstage, to arts appreciation and educational consultations offstage. The students exhibited commitment to our process by giving added time and energy to the show, and they were in turn energized by what they gained. Though there were many times during the outreach activities when students seemed intimidated by the consultations, in my observation facing these discussions head on is what afforded them the bravery to engage so fully in the flawed aspects of the characters they were portraying. Moreover, outreach events connected students to our larger purpose in producing the play, and what it ultimately communicates to the world through the audiences it reaches. Each individual’s discovery of a “bigger why” is part of what I started seeding in the character conversations, what was nurtured by each outreach event, and what I find essential to accessing the fullest expression of meaning behind making theater. I did not anticipate the degree to which my own purpose and bigger why would be touched by the events we organized for the students’ benefit. These events included attending plays in the community, having guests in rehearsal, and receiving consultations from local educators, culminating in the student moderation team’s facilitation of a post-show discussion of *Appropriate*.

At the end of rehearsal week one, several members of the cast and some students in the department attended *An Octoroon* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins at Artists Repertory Theatre. The
show was a wild and wonderful, meta-theatrical Brechtian melodrama, which filled me with thoughts about how Jacobs-Jenkins addresses such similar themes of racial equality and the effects of slavery in works with of radically different genres. “Form is always a character,” he told Eliza Bent. To my surprise, the talkback discussion following the show was unmoderated, but informally introduced by one of the actors. My belly tightened with the weight of what had happened at that theater in past discussions, but audience responses were emotional and respectful.

A couple days into week two, Elijah and I were finally able to make contact with team members at Resolutions Northwest, a local nonprofit I knew had worked with local theaters on ED&I training. I was still looking for that on-site authoritative moderation presence Lisa Grady-Willis had suggested, and Jones and Mones of Red Door were not available. I hoped the Resolutions Northwest team would be interested in filling the role, though I knew it was a strange request for to ask for a “spotter” from a nonprofit organization that usually provides facilitation and conflict moderation training on racial and social justice.

In trying to set up a meeting, I followed up my email inquires with a call to explain what we were doing. “Are you a white woman?” the voice on the phone asked me bluntly. I said yes. “Are you working with a person of color to put this together?” Yes, I said again. She paused, as if weighing my response. Perhaps this was too simple an answer, and she was waiting for me to justify myself further. Getting off the phone, I reminded myself that Resolutions Northwest had a right to be suspicious. Thinking of the firefighter back at the TCG Conference, I’d seen first hand how “well meaning” and “well intentioned” white people still managed to cause damage to race relations by remaining unaware of their positional standing.
Elijah and I got a meeting with two facilitators, Carlos Windham and Alonzo Chadwick, both men of color who had seen or in Chadwick’s case, performed in *Hands Up*. Immediately, Chadwick expressed concern about Kevin’s short time with us, and questioned what kind of useable training we could get in two hours with him. Ideally this was a three-month endeavor, they explained. I tried to explain that that was not possible within the scope of *Appropriate*. This led into a larger discussion of why I was pursuing a meaningful post-show discussion on racial issues at the University, and what I hoped to gain by doing so. Windham spoke passionately and at length to me about holes he saw in my thinking and the larger issues at stake. He started off by saying that he thought a post-show discussion was a bad idea, which Chadwick seconded. The two intimated that talkbacks do more harm than good, and wondered if it was even possible to have a talkback in Portland in which black and brown people would not be hurt. In their opinion, it was not necessary or helpful for white people to speak about their feelings after a show about race. Further, Windham warned me of putting student moderators in danger by placing them in front of a largely white audience potentially made hostile by the content of the play, and called what I was doing “throwing a hand grenade and hoping it goes okay.” I was disappointed that he did not seem to understand that that was the precise reason I had come to them for help. But he went on: he cited experiences of Walidah Imarisha, an Oregon author and activist, while traveling around the state educating audiences about Oregon’s (often racist) black history, being insulted or threatened statewide by ignorant and insensitive comments from white people. Windham said I should expect backlash from audiences, because the biggest threat in race-based conversations comes when white people call out other white people out on their racist behavior. He cited the MAX train incident in which two white men were killed by a white supremacist for
defending two young women, one of whom was wearing a hijab. He critiqued some of the critical questions I had identified in my agenda document for the meeting. Rather than asking “what is the role of white people in the struggle for racial equity” the real question he uses as a rubric is to look at every situation wondering who’s burdened and who benefits. Windham rejected my goal to create “mutual understanding” between white people and POCs, saying such exchange was not realistic where inequity is present. “Black people are the Jane Goodall of white people at your school,” he posited, turning to Elijah. He explained that there are no “two sides” in such unequal situations, there was a dominant norm and 1% of minorities trying to study and fit into that norm. He expressed distrust for people who pass themselves off as allies for POCs but allow the political realities of Trump’s America to occur every day. Windham at one point overstated my intention to change the ecology of my school with this one event, but at the same time was clearly a lover of theater and film and believed in the power of the arts to “kick a hole in someone’s reality.” He returned to his own critical questions and I inferred later, he was likely wondering this as he looked a Elijah and I wanting to have a talkback at University of Portland: who’s burdened and who benefits?

Underneath all of this discussion was a suggestion to disrupt expectations of what a “talkback” is or should be. His recommendations instead were to provide “plug-ins,” meaning information on organizations audiences could support which work for racial and social justice, or resources that would allow them to learn more about the issues. I could have audiences do a timed writing, rather than speaking, on what they learned If we did want to allow the audience to speak, he recommended a very tightly structured timeframe, such as turning to your neighbor and each getting one minute to share your individual experience of prejudice or injustice. At the end
of the discussion, a moderator might allow some audience members to share one thing learned today or one thing a person was going to do as a result of what they had learned at this event.

At this point I had to ask for clarification on whether Resolutions Northwest was interested in working with us, and to my surprise they replied yes with enthusiasm. Unfortunately, we were never able to work out their schedules with the performance run, nor find any room for an additional training.

Elijah and I tip-toed out of the meeting together, and once we hit the street, laughed off the tension that had built up during the last hour. We considered if what we were doing was misguided. Elijah felt it was worth fighting for. I knew that our students’ two hours with Jones was not enough, but did that mean I should not be attempting a conversation? Was I naive to think a talkback could be positive? Was that my white privilege? I swiftly came to the simple (or simpleton’s) conclusion that engaging the conversation was better than not. I knew I could not do it perfectly, and that I would make mistakes along the way. But I thought back to my research project and one the most resilient students, who had stated of her learning journey on race relations at one point, “You have be be able to say I fucked up and I am ready to change” (Wallenfels, Research Project).

I think I understand why Windham tested me with a ruthless firestorm of words, and while it minimally hurt my sense of pride that he did not recognize what I feel as my integrity, I understood, and the bruised ego was easy to set aside. My takeaway was that we could make the talkback whatever we wanted it to be, and emailed the Liberating Structures website\textsuperscript{11} to Elijah. Though we didn’t end up using them, it was refreshing to remember just because there is an industry standard model of the post-show discussion, we did not have to adhere to it.
Meanwhile in the rehearsal room, Dr. Gaudino spoke with the cast, sharing the ideas she communicated to Elijah and I over the summer. I sense the cast slowing down to take in the gravity of her mini-lecture. Intergenerational trauma is one of the most resonant ideas for them. It seems that even beyond *Appropriate*, it is a concept that many of us have felt but not had a name for. The cast emerged with a greater sense of the weight of the given circumstances from which the humor must spring.

In a chance meeting, Prof. Gregory Pulver gave me the business card of Yuri Hernandez Osorio, who had just been hired as the University’s Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator and agreed to meet with me about the play. Hernandez Osorio encouraged me to reach out to the multicultural clubs she oversees in her new position, such as Movimiento Estudiantil de Chicanos de Aztlan (MEChA), the Filipino American Student Association (FASA), and the Guam and Hawai’i clubs. She encouraged me to think inclusively, perhaps even extending our reach to the Gay Straight Partnership and Feminist Discussion Group. Hernandez Osorio seemed a bit suspicious of what my motives in mounting *Appropriate* and surrounding events might be, and I could understand why. She was weeks into a new job and as I had come to expect, my description of the play was off-putting, especially to a person of color. I tentatively floated the proposition of having Hernandez Osorio act as our moderation mentor if Resolutions Northwest did not work out, and she was receptive. She wanted to read the play and get back to me. Mulling over my tepid reception from Hernandez Osorio in combination with the other experiences, the next day I wrote in my rehearsal log, “ask for help again and again.”

Kevin Jones brought his Red Door partner Lesli Mones with him to our consultation for the student moderation team, which was now Meghan, Emma, Elijah, Kalā, Brandon, and Pat. Red
Door Project’s mission is the change the racial ecology of Portland, and after telling us a little bit about themselves, Mones led off with nuts and bolts of facilitation skills (see Appendix B). She periodically stopped to check for understanding, as the concepts were seemingly straightforward (such as learning your own biases), but complex to truly grasp.

Jones disrupted Mones, beginning to facilitate us (the *Appropriate* team) on our own biases. He used provocation to stir the pot in the small group, starting by sharing personal examples of his own biases. He then questioned students directly about their own. When prodded, one student spoke about being afraid to say the wrong thing in front of a person of color. It was hard for me to witness, because I was worried about the students’ reactions. I notice what I interpret to be white fragility coming up—mine and possibly other people’s—when the purity of my intentions are questioned. Kevin challenged Meghan, who had hardly ever been around black and brown people growing up in Klamath Falls, on her blindness regarding her privilege. He challenged the other student for picking and choosing when he engages on racism, providing that he, Kevin, doesn’t get to choose. This was off-putting but powerful pedagogy, and I hoped, good for them to have these questions really hit home. At one point Jones and Mones began to openly disagree about how to go on with the consultation. Suddenly issues of gender dominance jumped into the room. It was uncomfortable, but showed they weren’t afraid of conflict.

It got personal. Elijah asked a facilitation question about how to follow up an audience comment without sounding sarcastic, for example, “If a white person says they are uncomfortable with black people, I want to say all white people are uncomfortable with black people.” The room stopped.
“Do you believe that? That all white people are uncomfortable with black people?” Mones asked. Elijah solemnly said yes. Jones said, I notice you are the only black person in the room. We, who considered ourselves Elijah’s friends and collaborators, who were predominantly white, looked at one another. “How do these other people feel about that statement?” Jones asked. Others spoke, affirming Elijah as correct. One student said growing up in DC and Baltimore, there were obvious racial lines that white people did not cross, so she did not have as much exposure. Another volunteered that he felt he is slow to open up to POCs, although he doesn’t like that about himself. I disagreed that all white people are uncomfortable with black people. Jones pointed out that me as a white person, disagreeing with other white people, was powerful. It felt more honest (and scary) than any discussion we’ve had so far about the issues behind this play. I wondered what it would be like if cultural competency could be a required semester-long class for incoming freshmen?

Prof. Simon Ahiokhai, a systematic theology professor originally from Nigeria, rapturously told Elijah and I how much he loved the play with unabashed admiration for the piece. He had already written a draft of the paper he intended to read at the Garaventa Center event which preceded one of our weekend performances, and handed us a copy. It struck me that as a non-American, Dr. Ahiokhai did not have the same charge around the Civil War and slavery; Americans, by the same token, do not have the quite same charge around English colonizers. He looked at *Appropriate* through a distinctly theological lens I found foreign and fascinating, likening the crisis the Lafayettes’ experience to the Catholic crucifixion necessary for renewal. Nostalgia for the past, and for a parent who has passed away, causes the siblings to remember their legacy, and by “re-membering” this past they attempt to make the wounded
family (and country) whole again. Sometimes the crisis is necessary, discomfort is necessary, in order for us to construct a new identity, he observed. *Appropriate* is a subversive experience that allows blacks into the white “cultural kitchen,” he pointed out, to hear what whites say about them when they are not around. My confidence soared as I connected Dr. Ahiokhai’s conclusion of the paper with proposed solutions for avoiding white fragility:

…the dilemma faced by the characters in the play *Appropriate* can be resolved if they understand that the ugly past is not supposed to lead them to despair. Rather, it is supposed to be the springboard for a focused determination to right all wrongs, undo all injustices, shatter all chains of bondage, un-speak all hateful words, and embrace all that have been previously excluded from the social places of encounter.

I was not sure that *Appropriate* could “right all wrongs,” or that it is even possible to “un-speak all hateful words,” but I do believe in the “liberating grace” that Dr. Ahiokhai held out to those for whom “the ugly past becomes a moment of grace for them to express both a sense of gratitude and repentance. They become determined to never repeat it. They are humbled and seek forgiveness from those that past has hurt.”

Danielle Dillard, president of the Black Student Union, attended our designer run, and I found myself nervous to hear her responses. Afterwards, she said that the show was at times hard to watch, but absorbing. She found herself involved the whole time, and did not have the desire to shut off and leave as I feared. She was committed to the post-show discussion.

By the end of our third week of rehearsal, I developed some anxiety when I had heard that a few cast members from *An Octoroon* had asked Elijah how we were handling the racial violence content in the room, and whether we were really unpacking it. He told them, truthfully, that we did not have a lot of time in rehearsal to do that. I imagined their judgement of my process and asked one of the co-directors if she would have a FaceTime call to share her learnings about creating safety in the room. She said she’d prefer if the cast joined her, and they
gathered in the green room one night before their show. Before the digital meeting, we opened our circle with the beginning rehearsal ritual, and I verbally set aside feelings that I was not good enough, was not smart enough, was not “woke” enough to lead this process. I could feel others around the circle on the brink of being overwhelmed at this moment in the process, as we wound up our third week, when half of our days off had had outreach activities. Additionally, *An Octoroon* and the Jones/Mones consult had been intense for those who participated. I hoped that by sharing my feelings of inadequacy I’d be legitimizing others, but I wondered if I was just spreading fear.

Cast members of *An Octoroon* appeared on the iPad before their show from the green room, and we heard more about their process of building trust in the room through checkins and agreements. A white actor spoke about her relationship to her white privilege in this process as something she had to connect both to the character (an unsympathetic boor) and herself. “No matter how woke you think you are, you’re not,” she said, as if answering the question I’d voiced in our opening rehearsal ritual. She stated that she had asked the POCs in the room at the beginning of the process to educate her if she were to say something ignorant. She also worked to maintain an awareness that unlike her POC castmates, she can take off the burden of being concerned with race at the end of the show. A black actor spoke about the higher purpose behind the show being an educational one, and using that to reassure herself it was worth the cost of playing “another slave.” A Latinx actor spoke about her fear that audience members were not always taking out what she wanted them to take out. They spoke about disagreeing as a cast about the sensationalism of the lynching image, which is projected in the the show per Jacobs-Jenkins’ stage directions, and their ability to come to a compromise by building an altar to him in
the lobby. Afterwards, I think my cast were moved that a group of professional actors had cared enough to reach out to them, and emboldened by seeing and hearing examples of people doing the same thing we were doing for the same reasons.

Our second consultation with the Red Door Project centered around *Hands Up*, including opportunities to talk to Jones and Mones both before and after the show. In attendance were Meghan, Elijah, Kalā, Brandon, Pat and myself. Others attended the *Hands Up* performance without taking part in the consults.

Jones and Mones kindly offered an extra half hour to our moderation team before the show, and after our previous session I wasn’t sure what to expect. When they asked what this information about facilitation, bias and triggers had meant to them and our upcoming talkback, students struggled to answer in quiet confusion. It was clear we as a team had not had time or space to reflect on and apply the learnings, which is where a director of outreach learning would have been helpful. When Jones and Mones asked us what we had discovered about our own biases since we last talked, the students wondered aloud, “How do I find them?” and “What do I do with them when I find them?”

Jones and Mones emphasized some prior points from first workshop, zeroing in on the need to share your own vulnerability as a facilitator as part of cultivating a safe space. Often it is fear masking our biases, they offered, perhaps in response to our group’s reticence to speak. If you do not identify your own biases, they warned, the crowd will find the spots where you as facilitator are unconscious, and gravitate to them. If you identify your bias, you might be able to leverage it as a strength, helping to represent a viewpoint for others in the room. Kevin shared his bias against the LGBTQ population, which surprised me. Yet knowing this bias allows him to
step into the “role” of homophobic in the room, he pointed out.

The two asked us to be “participant-facilitators” during that day’s talkback, helping to cultivate positive dialogue through our own contributions. But no one from our group said anything during the talkback, including myself. The first comment was from an older white man who had been asked by an actor to put away his cell phone during the show. The white man wanted everyone to know he was taking notes on his phone because he was seeing the show a second time, and that he had adopted children of color. He wanted to go on and had to be cut off, which Jones and Mones did swiftly and expertly.

In the debrief with Jones and Mones after the talkback, our group was very quiet again. It is possible they had a hard time expressing their feelings after the show. Some were grateful to have seen and heard a perspective they could not have had access to otherwise, in a presentation that was hard-hitting. Jones and Mones began prodding individuals again. Kalā spoke about relating to more of it than he thought he would, Elijah responded positively to seeing so much representation of black people on stage. Others were having a hard time articulating themselves. Meghan began to speak, and became tearful.

“Nothing,” she stopped herself, “None of those words were good,” she joked in a self-depreciating manner. Mones then challenged Meghan on her “internalized misogyny.” Meghan looks at Mones with the eyes of a deer in headlights. “What?” she says, as though she has received a fatal diagnosis.

“We’ll talk about that another time,” said Mones. Another tear rolled down Meghan’s face.

I spoke with Meghan about this exchange on the way home. She did not cry because she was upset or felt picked on, as I feared. A feeling had come over her, she said, as she began to
think about all of these issues in the first consultation with Jones and Mones. It was a feeling like anger and sadness, but mostly, she said, it was “why?” As in, why does the world have to be this way? Why is there such cruelty and prejudice? “I love spending time with them,” she assured me, and I noticed it was the second time she had said it that day. She shared with me that she viewed her own anxiety differently, now that she recognizes her privilege in a new way.

I suggested to Elijah that we should take Jones and Mones’ advice and have a debrief. I realized that Elijah’s deadlines for designing the final post-show discussion event were coming right up. Thinking of somehow summing up the knowledge we had heard from Carlos Windham at Resolutions Northwest along with that of Jones and Mones, I reached for the article Rachel DeSoto Jackson had written on the *We Are Proud To Present* talkbacks she’d co-presented. She too, had started them with audience members sharing with one another in one-minute conversations. Her findings on the power of using personal narrative to promote dialogue, rather than debating or discussing a position, echoed Jones and Mones’ suggestion for audience members to speak from their bodies instead of their heads. After a brief personal exchange among audience members, each night she had a different respondent share their experience and personal narrative. Finally audience members were invited to share their own experience and personal narrative. Desoto Jackson also has student assessment data to back up the powerful shifts in perception that occurred as a result of conversations she moderated after the play.

Elijah and I agreed that he would lead a *Hands Up* moderation team debrief, as outreach was his project, although I overparticipated out of the nervousness I felt when I heard the same silence that would descend when Jones and Mones had worked with us. It was difficult to elicit responses to questions I thought were simple, like what did they get out of *Hands Up*? What did
they get out of the facilitation consultations? What did they notice about the post-show discussion following *Hands Up*? This subject had not gotten any easier in the month we had been working on it.

One student shared that they valued seeing *Hands Up* because it gave them a perspective they couldn’t possibly have gotten on their own. We remarked on the power of theater to humanize struggles that are not our own. When I asked about the group’s reactions to Jones and Mones’ teaching style, I heard positive reactions. They thought they were direct because it is a hard subject. I shared that I had felt worried about them as my collaborators and fellow students because I felt responsible for them, and I didn’t want them to feel put off or picked on, but they assured me they did not. Elijah affirmed this to me again later, one on one. In discussing the facilitation after *Hands Up*, the students remarked on the way Jones and Mones handled the first speaker from the audience, who had reacted angrily to being called out by an actor onstage. Students noticed how the facilitators handled others who wanted to respond combatively to the man, and stopped others from attacking him. In these actions they saw the facilitators walking their talk of making sure everyone felt respected, even if you do not agree with them. The students could not yet imagine themselves doing this in a facilitation.

Students noted that it is difficult to locate one’s own biases, because they are invisible to you. Elijah ventured that one of his biases is that he immediately identifies with black people. Pat shared how sensitive he had become to an issue that was hot that day, athletes’ right to peaceful protest during the national anthem. I shared some of my thoughts about my own biases against older white men who lecture and toward African Americans by whom I wish to be approved of. Because of our work with Jones and Mones, I had been able truly examine these bias for the first
time. Later, I thought also of my fear of black people’s anger, which was a subject that had come up with Carlos Windham’s anger, and how my impulse to be seen as “one of the good people” came up.

We segued into planning for the *Appropriate* post-show discussion, and I could hear the group become more active as theory became practice. Elijah had a draft of the event outline to share that evoked some valuable disagreement. Should we have audience members talk to a neighbor, or take “popcorn” responses from the audience first thing? Would “popcorn” tap into people’s need to be seen in a bad way? Moreover, if the panel was an intellectual pursuit, how could we ask audience members to speak from their hearts instead of their heads? And if we didn’t give the audience much of a chance to speak (the outline was weighted heavily toward letting each of the six panelists be heard), weren’t we perpetuating the same missteps made by PACOI earlier in the year?

I realized that while Elijah and I had been planning the post-show discussion for months now, we had not shared concrete details with the moderation team. From the rush of questions students had as they imagined designing the event, I saw that I should have done a better job of allowing the team to formulate its own ideas of what it wanted the talkback to be. If they’d been told to consciously use each outreach touchpoint to build their post-show discussion outline together, they might have engaged in each event in a different, more empowered way.

Elijah’s participation throughout this debrief meeting was fearless. He offered input from his own experience freely as others hung back, the reverse situation of what I had witnessed in classroom situations prior to the *Appropriate* process. Every time I prodded students in this conversation (as Jones and Mones had done), Elijah jumped in. As the others went in to the
Mago Hunt Theater, I asked Elijah why they’d been so quiet. It’s not something most people talk about every day, he said simply. And they don’t know what it has to do with them so they’re not sure what to say or do.

The absolute clarity with which he saw this situation struck me. And again I saw how far we have to go in creating safe, inclusive campus communities in the US right now. Two days later I determined that Resolutions Northwest would not be able to work with us on the post-show discussion, but I was lucky to confirm Hernandez Osorio’s participation as our on-site moderator mentor shortly thereafter.

The experience of Lisa Grady-Willis’ learning event began to work on me as soon as I tried to start marketing it. Grady-Willis was wrapped up in the beginning of school and had not gotten back to me with a picture of herself for me to create digital and print imagery about the event. I figured rather than continuing to bother her, I would purchase a stock photo online and begin designing the promotional image. In the search box at the stock photo site, I stumbled. “Equity” got you financial images, “race” got you runners. “Inclusion” gets you a lot of people holding hands. “Justice” offered Lady Justice with her scales, which is what I chose. Then I realized how hard it was to write a description. Not only did I have no real idea of what she was going to do, I found it almost impossible to write something that would not anger some segment of our population. I was confounded that I, who had done so much thinking on the subject, could not seem to write something actually inclusive about an event to increase inclusion. My draft included language about “cultural responsiveness” and “theoretical and practical approaches” (see fig. 2).
Reviewing the draft, Grady-Wills sent me her picture and commented, “I would really recommend using another image due to the legal inference of the scales.” Thinking of what “law and order” means to different cultural groups, I thanked her for her valuable input. She also thankfully rewrote the description, adding the word “Exploring” to the title and gentle queries to its body, such as “Consider the role that you play in fostering a truly inclusive campus.” I revised the image (fig. 3).
The event itself (see Appendix C) attracted approximately 19 attendees in addition to Elijah and myself. Students, faculty and staff members mingled in the seats as Grady-Willis took the podium and swept us up in a fearless, airtight argument defining the terms identity, diaspora, and ethnicity before defining race as a social construct. Grady-Willis used simple word equations to establish the differences between prejudice and racial prejudice, white skin privilege, and power and how they combine to create racism and oppression. Stressing our relationship to one another as positional, she pointed out that systemically conferred dominance is often invisible to those that have it, making racism invisible to those in power. She used humor and compassion to reach us, and administered a powerful participatory exercise which put a measurement of each person’s privilege on their body. It was easy to see that some people had more privilege than others, and Grady-Willis went on to make the case that social justice seeks readiness from those with more privilege to share theirs so that all people may have what we
consider to be basic privilege. We all have power in some sphere of influence, Grady-Willis proposed. Using the power and privilege you have to achieve aims that benefit inclusion and social justice starts with our awareness of it. If you are busy denying your privilege, you are not exercising your power. You may be ignoring your privilege, but injustice is still happening. She closed with hope and song, and more than one person was in tears.

The post-show discussion, “Of Theft and Destruction: American legacies in *Appropriate*, A Panel Discussion” followed our second performance (See Appendix D). Many audience members stayed after to join the conversation, and Elijah led the rest of the moderation team in first asking the audience to have a one-minute conversation with their neighbor about the show. Elijah then re-introduced himself and framed the evening expertly, noting:

I am a black male, and it’s uncomfortable for me to talk about race, so I imagine that it’s uncomfortable for you as well. But we have to sit in our uncomfortability so that we can learn – so we can grow into something greater. I am also very new to facilitating discussions about race, so this isn’t gonna be perfect.

He and other students took turns asking questions of the panelists, which led to those rare moments in a panel discussion that feel truly spontaneous. Winston Grady-Willis, head of the school of Gender, Race and Nations at PSU, opened with a story about his grandmother telling him stories of being a slave when he was a little boy. The theme of uncomfortability that Elijah started with became a welcome callback joke. “My heart is beating so fast right now,” said Danielle Dillard, president of the BSU, and everyone laughed before she explained that she had worried when she first saw the play that the critique of racism would be too subtle for white people to notice. Kalā shared his feelings of being out of place in the conversation on race that *Appropriate* sparks; Hernandez Osorio found Jacobs-Jenkins’ treatment of race to be a bit dated in the way it squares black and white people off, neglecting intersectionality. Each person spoke
honestly and courageously as they shared their truth. Elijah took a few questions and comments from the audience that ranged from frustration with the apathy of the characters onstage to anger at Toni’s level of denial, to stories from their own lives. A feeling of fellowship prevailed. There were so many events under the banner of outreach, *Appropriate* participants (including me) could barely contain the learnings from them all. By the project’s close, I recognized the need for an experienced leadership figure to help students unpack the learnings of these events so that cast and crew could process and use the experiences in their own work going forward.

Concomitant with this, our moderation team was slow to take ownership of the post-show discussion event because I had organized the panelists with Elijah ahead of time, and because I did not build time and space into the process for reflection and integration toward our culminating outreach event. Doing so would have meant less outreach experiences, but perhaps, richer take-aways and students experiencing less fear about stepping forward into the subject matter. As Grady-Willis’ learning event drew to a close, I was struck by her advocacy to use the privilege you have. My original question about the “appropriate” role of white people in the struggle for racial equity had been flipped on it’s head twice now: by Windham, who advised I’d do better to look around me and ask who benefits and who’s burdened, and by Grady-Willis, who made me think about my readiness to share my unequal portion of privilege.

By the time I was writing my director’s note for the program, some of these ideas had coalesced. I wrote:

> I invite you to take the ideas, images and feelings from *Appropriate* home with you…For you, taking action may mean conversations with friends and family, raising your voice for inclusion and racial equity into your workplace, getting angry, or simply becoming more aware of your own blind spots. The director Peter Sellars, once a curator of one of the largest multicultural arts festivals in the world, wrote:

> Go with the greatest anger. Let yourself as the person of power in the room be attacked and don’t take it
personally. Listen. Listen to what is being said and ask yourself: ‘What can I do?’ (Sellars quoted in Delgado and Svi ch 137).

I have been commended, questioned and insulted for choosing this play. Since last May, assistant director Elijah Fisher and I have sought out partners and consultants who would help inform our work on the play, as well as help us set the stage for productive conversations surrounding the show and its themes. I have been shaken more than once by what I heard when I asked these partners for their true opinions of our objectives. Yet even at my shakiest, I am guided by the conviction that the attempt, usually imperfect, to have structured, respectful conversations on race is better than not. This journey has partially been a practice of asking for help with that and listening to the answers that came, again and again.
8. Tech/Performance

The day after Lisa Grady-Willis’ “Race, Power & Privilege” learning event, the *Appropriate* production team headed into our cue to cue rehearsal, turning our attention fully toward the artistic product for the next week.

In two paper techs leading up to cue to cue, it was clear to me that this show was different than any other show I had ever done in that it had no music. Lighting, too differed from most of my previous shows. Rather than hard separations of scenes or punctuations for presentational segments, Prof. Larsen had inserted a number of subtle, internal shifts I had not anticipated, which emphasized the emotions of the scenes. For the destruction ballet, we got into a complicated discussion of cueing for the music aspects. Prof. Hal Logan had been thinking of timing his sound cues to the lights, but I told him I was interested in the music flowing continuously. He was open to this, but it was different than what he had originally planned and it took a moment to get realigned. Working on the destruction ballet, I was amazed at how difficult it is to get four people visualizing the same thing. Meghan had a shaky start writing all the cues, she eventually found her rhythm in taking in a lot of information. In our second paper tech, Prof. Logan was still struggling with conceptualizing how to build the sound effects into the destruction ballet among the tableaux created for each event. I thought I had communicated clearly at the last paper tech, and it seemed like we had took a step backward. I was not sure of my culpability in this miscommunication.

As discussed in “Design and Production Collaborations,” I was dismayed in our final production meeting that the set dressing items hadn’t been incorporated before, but Megan delivered the set dressing at cue to cue and the running crew orbited around her as she applied it.
At some point during the day, I touched briefly on the need to create a choreography for the run crew to execute scenic changes between the acts. Since this usually falls to the ASM, I said this to Amanda in Megan’s presence, who I thought would want to help her as she was intimately connected with the set dressing at this point. I knew Megan was invested in the success of her pieces and would help Amanda orient them onstage. I expected that with all of the elements finally in place—the dressing and the crew—and with the long day, the group of them could devise a plan as Meghan (the stage manager) transitioned to the booth.

When Megan was finished with the set dressing she came out to the house and had many questions, thoughts, and other commentaries to share, now that she could see her work starting to get finalized onstage. I was having a hard time splitting my focus between watching the light cues, which I had never seen before, and being able to give Megan the attention she was asking for. I eventually moved away from Megan and closer to Larsen to make our communication clearer. When we hit the destruction ballet, a moment of panic hit the design team, before we took Prof. Larsen’s advice to “take it bit by bit.”

Prof. Pulver had let me know that we should incorporate Franz's wet clothing in the following day’s tech run. I agreed, but unfortunately AngelMarie was too sick to attend rehearsal. Complicating matters, it was Mun’s last rehearsal visit—the perfect time to try the wet clothes in the fight, but worst time to get Megan and costume shop manager Mooch Martin on the same page at the top of rehearsal with the goal of quickly problem solving on an offstage wetting station for Brandon. Megan was working on other things and was clearly upset. Mooch had no context for the show or understanding of what needed to happen. I could not get Megan and Mooch to talk to one another. Mun was standing around waiting to start her fight.
choreography rehearsal. Eventually we got Brandon onstage and wet to adjust his degree of wetness for the fight’s safety. It was important that we went through the exercise but torture to try to execute, for some reason. Backstage, actors suddenly had loads of questions about their wardrobe, which surprised me, since they’d had their clothes at designer run. The runthrough was exceedingly slow, and it was clear that the length of the transition between acts one and two might call for a brief intermission.

The following night of our first dress, no one could agree about how the time before our go should be used, and the various departments were bullying and steamrolling me to try to get things to go their way. I tried to interpret this as their investment/excitement in something they’d begun to think of as their own and were invested in success of their contribution.

I asked Megan to lead Amanda and run crew in rehearsing the transitions before we had actors on stage. Megan gave me what sounded like excuses and backpedaling. “I needed them to have that train wreck,” she said to me of the clunky transition the night before. I tried to have patience for whatever she may be telling me about contributing factors, but in all of what she said I did not hear her say that they would work on it. I restated my request with forced patience.

While Megan worked on stage, AngelMarie was dismayed with the 40 minutes I’d suggested the actors have for getting into wardrobe and makeup. I worked a speed through of act one in the makeup room with the actors. I attempted to give a few notes before fight call, but I could tell I was starting to lose them to the frenzy of the impending opening night. Other notes were repeat notes that they had not been able to take in—I could see they were rapidly reaching a saturation point. Before our go, Brandon as cast deputy pulled me aside to tell me that there was a crew member who felt unappreciated, and that I was putting a lot of pressure on them. The
person wished to remain anonymous, but wanted me to know that I treat the cast and crew
differently. I didn’t take this news that well. I told him I was going to find time to talk to Megan,
because I knew something was wrong, but he said that wasn’t the person. I told him I thought I’d
been normal, friendly, and fair with run crew, and that if the person couldn’t let themselves be
known, I didn’t know how to help them.

I later examined my interactions with the run crew, which had been what I thought of as
brief but amicable. I didn’t always have time to connect with all of them, but there were
instances when they joined our rehearsal ritual and felt included, I’d thought. Going forward I
tried to find moments to start brief conversations or share that moment of the process with them.

Watching the show that night, I saw that the actors needed to really listen and really react,
but it seemed impossible to give that note at this moment in time. Also, something was off about
the timing of the sound cue of the gay porn coming from Rhys’ phone as he begins to
masturbate. There wasn’t enough time to hear the sound cue before he silenced it, and it wasn’t
clear that it was two men having sex—an important aspect of Rhys’ character journey.

On the day of our second dress, I initiated a difficult conversation in an attempt to resolve
conflict in one of my primary collaborative relationships. During the course of the conversation,
Megan and I came to understand each others’ points of view better, but there were a lot of hurt
feelings remaining.

I agreed to give 45 minutes for wardrobe and makeup; AngelMarie felt that was the bare
minimum. Watching the show that night, I realized giving actors rushed notes before the show
was having about a 20% success rate. Despite trying to be very blunt with Emma about pace in
act two, it was having no effect. One adjustment we added that night was the “falling hug,” in
which Toni loses her balance while trying to hug Rhys before going to bed in act two. It gave the ending of the scene a desperate, tragic quality I loved.

Prof. Logan tried a new cue for the gay porn, which we hoped was more explicitly gay, but the timing was still off. I figured Joe needed time to get used to it. Where other actors are putting the finishing touches on their performances, Sammie was busting out all over. She continued to explore lots of things in act two, most of them fruitful. With the discoveries come some rough edges that could have used smoothing out, but there was no time to go back and integrate. I was happy she felt safe and engaged enough to keep growing on second dress. As for the others, I could see they couldn’t take another note. I wondered if working up until opening was asking more than usual for the culture of our department.

I see now that I needed to carve out time with Megan, Amanda, and the run crew and make sure they could be successful with what I was asking of them. Instead I wanted them to take responsibility for the situation, and I thought that it was a realistic request. I also thought they would be familiar with this delegation of responsibility. But even Meghan (the stage manager) said she would have had a hard time determining the scenic transitions, and she had ASMed before. I realized rationally it was pointless to get mad at students for not knowing things they’ve never been taught, but I was still annoyed at the impact on our production. It would have been good to have a sit down checkin with Amanda about my expectations of her in advance, although in this case, Meghan had already done this as stage manager, so I left it in her hands.

On the morning of our first performance I got an email from our props designer Emma telling me she would not being doing any more for our production. I was unhappy with the final look of the wet photo album, which is an important symbol of the show, but I let it go. I noticed
how these last bumps tested my need to be liked.

8.1 Final design execution

By the time of opening, a number of design elements fell into place. Although the hoarding objects did not quite convey “layers of time” as I was hoping, Megan succeeded in creating a lovely layer of grime in her final paint treatment. We did not achieve a haunted house look at any point to support the ghost story aspect of *Appropriate*, which I had anticipated leaning toward in act two. Instead, the act’s lighting achieved a tightened visual isolation for the daisy chain of intimate two person scenes, which was a welcome contrast to the mass confusion of loud, accusatory group scenes in act one. The contrast of a hyperneat scenic arrangement in act three wasn’t as extreme as I would have liked due to limitations of set dressing, but did provide a clear change in look. In the final scene, the house did not so much collapse as various parts of it cracked or fluttered, set to a thundering light and sound score. Stagehands then broke the visual reality by appearing in black to disrupt the gravity of the space and fast forward time.

Lighting overall ended up more realistic than I had imagined in my concept, though selected moments brought a poetic elegance, such as in the opening scene, or an eerie departure from realism, such as when the chandelier spontaneously lit up in the fight scene. The chandelier lit up again in the final destruction ballet, bringing a ghostly presence which was effective. Finally, the addition of tightly spotlighting Ainsley wearing the KKK hood in bright green was a spectacular, indelible image Prof. Larsen brought to the show.

While the lines and silhouettes of AngelMarie’s costume design were in line with my preproduction concept, her fully realized design was ultimately much smarter and more precise than my conception. One example of this was that where I’d thought Rachael had molded
Cassidy into a sharp, tween version of herself. AngelMarie’s choice to make Cassidy a budding teenager in a tight crop top created more tension between both she and buttoned-up Rachael and she and Franz, due to Franz's past. Another example of how AngelMarie added to my concept was bringing Toni from a T-shirt and sweats to a buttoned up shirt and jeans. The short sleeved, plaid, slightly oversized shirt she wears in the final scene could have been Ray’s—implying that while she desires to hang on to the past, she is attempting to pull herself together by wearing clothes that are socially acceptable to go outside in.

Sound design set the tone for the evening, going from a realistic sounding single cicada to an impossible choir of cicadas manipulated into rhythmic call-and-response groups in the prologue. In our production this cicada composition elicited some laughter and some rustling, which I took to mean we had achieved the goal. Beyond the prologue, Prof. Logan created a constant, immersive soundscape throughout the show through the cicadas, which over time faded into the back of one’s awareness as an audience member. The effect when they stopped for our intermissions was fascinating, something like stepping off of a merry go round.

8.2 Audience and Production Run

The audience response during and after the first show was loud and overwhelming. Over the course of the run, there were reliable vocal responses from the audience members expressing horror or shock at the specimen jars, a gasp at Rhys’ celebratory anti-Semitic slur, and the reveal of the hood. From these responses I knew we had crafted a ride the audience was fully on. Laughter and sounds of disapproval also issued at the ridiculousness of the characters’ arguments and the discomfort of the masturbation scene. Though these vocal reactions varied with each performance, I have heard from many people who saw the show that they continued to talk about
it the next day, and received similar comments from cast members and faculty. As Jacobs-Jenkins stated of the successful audience to Bent in *American Theatre*, ours seemed to be “laughing at the same time and gasping at the same time.”

One night, a man laughed loud and long in the silence of the theater when the hood was revealed. He was African American. In our closing matinee, a chorus of titters and giggles came from the audience with the reveal of the hood. The actors were sometimes thrown by these responses, with some shaken or tearful at the idea that the hood might have given someone pleasure, because they feared it was an response approving of white supremacy. They could not see the race of the man who laughed and were operating out of fear. I tried to give them my perspective on the situation: we as artists don’t get to shape the audiences’ reactions, and there could be a million reasons why people react the way they do.

Actor notes after opening became an issue of confusion, I found out later. I had given Meghan notes on calling the show, but foregone actor notes after the first two performances, in some ways against my better instincts. On the day of our third show, I got feedback from an actor telling Elijah that Emma was not connecting on stage. Because another actor had made a similar comment to me privately, I decided to give notes to a couple of people, one of them being her. She had inverted the sense of a line the night before, but mostly I wanted to check in on what might be going on for the actor who felt Emma was “phoning it in.” I could not detect it from her performance, but I wanted to see if something else was wrong. She later told me it upset her to receive notes after opening, not because they came by surprise but because she felt it was her time to fly free on stage. Ultimately, I chalked it up to small adjustments Emma made in performance that felt big to her scene partner.
It was before this performance that I tried something new with Rhys’ masturbation moment which I hoped would increase the misapprehension between he and Franz, and make it more difficult for Rhys to get to the volume button on his phone. The adjustment was minimally successful, but worth a shot. The day of our second to last show, I had family in town, so asked Elijah to pass on my notes to cast after fight call. It sounds like the cast was not very receptive.

In creating *Appropriate*, we made huge leaps in strengthening the show between the designer run and our tech/dress run, but that period’s growth would be the most progress we would make.
9. Post-production Responses (Others)

In gathering post-production responses, I have gathered information from KCACTF respondents, university faculty members, professional critics and students involved with the production. Student feedback came both in the form of anonymous surveys and individual interviews. Getting several different points of view from those both inside and outside has shown me the aspects which were most universal about *Appropriate*.

What rose to the top was the strength of the performances, and how remarkable they were coming from college-aged students. Although they appeared at times over the top, caricatured or ridiculous, they were in line with the play and brought our audiences in and made them care about the characters. Another universal comment was the efficacy of the play for the times we are living in, and the artful commentary of using a realistic family drama to deliver a strong message that is about both people and political concepts at the same time. The choice of play is important but difficult, said an KCACTF respondent. An *Oregon Arts Watch* critic wrote “you can be totally sucked in by the emotionally real family drama, while the Big Social Issue lurks in the background” (Choban and Campbell). The handling of America’s racist history and current events through auxiliary outreach events was impactful for those involved and showed responsibility toward both presenting the material and expanding the perspectives of the production team. Finally, the scenic design made a strong statement and grounded the play in a recognizable reality which called up historical and social resonance important for the play.

Liabilities were that the production was often relentless in tempo, yet slow in the second act. Related to tempo was a sometimes forced, one-note level of angry intensity which stemmed particularly from Toni’s character. Throughout the show characters jumped straight to a high
level of emotion without working through the rising action to get there. Some members of the production team had bad experiences or became upset or frustrated with the working conditions and choices around time management.

Actors I surveyed individually through post-production interviews reported that they felt empowered and supported, although they felt that the size of the roles they had and what I was asking for as director was more demanding than what they had experienced before. One felt that I was very hard on her, but as one of the pivotal characters, she knew why. A physical exercise I did with them was particularly impactful in helping them to find their characters. Both found the outreach portion to affect their work as actors, saying “Outreach helped me tackle the bigger issue. I could work through some of my feelings on this stuff, and hear from other people on how they’re experiencing it.” Members of the production team I interviewed said the outreach portion of the experience had a big effect on them. One noted outreach activities “took it to another level of seriousness for me and…enhanced my experience of the play,” while another said “I see race everywhere now.”

Production team members also felt that my expectations were high, but noted them as manageable for them personally. Both said they felt they wanted to push themselves as well, and could tell me if they saw my expectations of them as unrealistic. For others, this high bar was not welcome, or seen as an unfair demand on a college student balancing a load of classes and school-life balance. As discussed in “Tech/Performance,” Megan let me know that she had not been able to tell me when she felt she was unfairly burdened, pushed to her edge, and under appreciated.

I will go into greater detail below about feedback from each set of respondents.
9.1 ACTF Respondents

Prof. Mace Archer from Mt. Hood Community College and Portland State University’s Prof. Karin Magaldi celebrated the performances of Emma and Pat in particular, and complemented my casting. Brandon, Kaylie, and Rebby also got positive mentions. Brandon reached emotionally compelling peaks but held visible tension. Kaylie fueled the fire as the outsider, but at times they felt sometimes her reactions were not tied to action. They appreciated the subtle complication of Rebby’s mixed motivations. They felt the first entrance of River and Franz through the window was a great way to start the show.

They felt the scenic proposal was evocative, though not quite right for hoarder. Still, the scenic achievement was impressive in scale and execution, while conveying feeling. One respondent called it a house where she would “not want to lean against the wall,” referring to the dirtiness conveyed by the paint treatment and set dressing. Respondents noted the tree framing pieces on either side of the stage (functioning as a faux proscenium arch) were too subtle. Costumes were effective in conveying character and relationship, as well as the contemporary context. Respondents had a positive reaction to the first cicada prologue, but questioned the length—this I took as a compliment, because that is exactly what the script says it is supposed to do. The second cicada cue was confusing due to the human element of the drums, and called up a potential Civil War reference for Prof. Archer that he didn’t know what to make of.

Expanding on the statements above regarding “one-note” characters or scenes, they would have liked to see the characters incorporate more “notes on the scale” to fill out rising and falling action in scenes, articulating the need for the energy to go down before it can go back up. Their note to “breathe the play” spoke directly to my recognition of the need for greater listening and
responding in the moment. They found Toni/Rhys and Rhys/Cassidy scenes to have more of a
genuine ebb and flow. Prof. Magaldi would have liked to watch Toni operating outside her
comfort zone in places, to explore the boundaries. Moments of unmotivated movement created
good stage pictures, but it was clear when actors didn’t know why they were doing it.

The final scene was “something you go home thinking about,” and they both thought it was
meant to convey the presence of ghosts. However, stagehands broke the illusion of ending for
them.

9.2 University Faculty Respondents

Prof. Mead Hunter found it to be an “outstanding theatrical experience” and all of the faculty
responded positively to my work with actors, in particular the three siblings. I drew out
performances that were exceptionally truthful, vulnerable, and demonstrative of active listening
from Emma and Pat. Though the actors did better playing the characters’ ages than most faculty
anticipated, some were at points playing a generality or feeling above a specific objective. It was
noted that my work creating trust in the room had paid off in actor investment and performance.

During the final stages of rehearsal and tech I made major progress with stage pictures,
blocking and motivated movement. Prof. Golla noted spacial relationships sharpened and
clarified the action of the scenes apart from language, though Prof. Larsen noted some
“centrifuge” blocking which smashed the characters up against the walls at points.

There was a need for more variation in tempo throughout the show. Part of this is due to
the actors’ need to act on the line instead of in between. Joe’s attempts to fall asleep in act two
were a particular low point in pace for Prof. Gregory Pulver. Pace never seemed to resolve,
however, into a fully fleshed-out ride.
Faculty let me know that the backstage crew didn’t feel taken care of in the same way actors were, and that my expectations were more than they could give or felt that they were pushed past their breaking points, particularly Megan. I was encouraged to handle students in these positions with much more care as I look to directing more academic theater. Though I find it frustrating that it wasn’t communicated to me that teaching backstage roles and responsibilities was my responsibility, I see now that it was. By the time I saw the need for it, I was not willing to shift my priorities away from the finishing touches on actor staging and performance I was focused on, and frustrated by others’ unwillingness to step up, and threatened by some people’s need to actively fight me. Faculty’s articulation of the issues in working with Megan brought up pedagogical questions of when to offer positive reinforcement and gauging who needs it when.

Prof. Mindi Logan brought it to my attention that one of my actors had a negative reaction to receiving notes after opening. Interviewing Emma later she volunteered this information herself, and let me know that warning her beforehand wouldn’t have helped. She sees it as her territory to “throw it all away” after opening, which I understood. I gave her notes partially because there had been an important line flub the night before and because I’d received feedback from the cast about lessened commitment and emotional connection onstage. I felt it would be less damaging to keep her engaged in working on a few key points than to risk her feeling a cast member was against her. After following up with other cast members, I found that it could have been that small adjustments made by her in reaction to audience or in disagreement with my direction that had big impact on one scene partner who was particularly sensitive to any changes she might make.

Faculty articulated that I created a safe space where people could feel, sob and question
themselves. They knew our outreach program was a lot to manage with the task of directing the show as well, but they didn’t have any additional resources to offer me. I articulated that I would have loved to have a faculty member with the expertise of Grady-Willis or Hernandez-Osorio to co-lead the outreach piece—a POC for students to report back to, unpack questions with, and articulate learning.

9.3 Oregon Arts Watch

Reviewers Maria Choban and Brett Campbell attended a performance and posted a review on October 28, 2017. Positives included the performances of the college age actors portraying characters many years older.

Wallenfels directed her young actors to go way over the top, caricaturing the stereotypes they played… Particularly effective were Toni (Emma Pace), the cynical porcupine-quill-jettisoning martyr; River (Rebby Foster), the new-age Portland hipster; Cassidy (Sammie Van Norstrand), the ADHD hormone driven teenager (Choban and Campbell).

The reviewers were enticed to attend the University’s amateur production (which isn’t standard practice for the publication) due to their interest in An Octoroon, which had been recently produced at Artists Repertory Theatre.

Emma also received some negative attention as being unconvincing in the culminating speech at the end of the play, when Choban and Campbell note characters go to “unexpected extremes that are difficult for any actor, much less college students, to capture without seeming like they’re portraying different people. But I agree that any theater fan would appreciate the excellent work these students and their director turned in here.” The writers called “UP’s production was one of the best I’ve ever seen on a college stage.”

Both reviewers remarked at length on the accomplished playwriting in Appropriate and the
darkly funny tone ("The audience is laughing as the horror ratchets" and "weirdly, sometimes bleakly funny") in combination with the ridiculous style ("wild cartoon exaggerations and furious forward motion"). The black humor (no pun intended) was able "to keep the story from getting heavy and tedious." Choban and Campbell noted Jacobs-Jenkins’ crafty flip of what "seemed at first to be a standard Chekhov/Tennessee Williams family drama, and then brilliantly used that frame to engage us in a deeper, darker story that’s even more relevant now with the resurgence of white supremacist ideology than it probably seemed four long years ago." The reviewers also remarked on pace, noting "Wallenfels directed her cast to accelerate into and on top of each other," but both objected to a "snoozy" second act. "Wallenfels choreographed her actors with purpose and forward motion. A lot of thought and creative surprise went into how actors moved across the stage or engaged acrobatically with the sofa (as did love-struck Cassidy showing off for her cousin)."

The two reviewers actually disagreed about whether the show is more about race and racism or love. Choban wrote, "I think it’s a false, maybe even a white liberal guilt construct, to say that Appropriate is about racism….He’s using what he knows, racism, to construct a powerful, sad story about love, even as we laugh our asses off inappropriately.” Conversely, Campbell yet resolves itself with the idea that here, “those perennials are poisonously intertwined.”

Choban and Campbell called the final scenes “visual poetry,” and interpreted its message as “Time passes, things fall apart. Only the racism remains intact.” This takeaway was actually the opposite of what I’d hoped audience members would get. Megan and AngelMarie both got design plaudits.
### 9.4 Anonymous Student Surveys

Nine out of 13 students responded to the collaborator survey sent out by Prof. Golla regarding their experience of *Appropriate*. The survey is anonymous and mostly reflected both my observation and experience, as well as information passed along by faculty members in my evaluation. 55% of students surveyed said I was open to collaboration and called the experience of working with me “very satisfying.” Actors all said they would be interested in working with me again, but “designers and crew either said they didn’t know, or that they wouldn’t work with you again” (Golla 3).

Statements which most clearly reflected the successful aspects of the overall collaboration had to do with balancing my aspirations for the show with student input. One respondent wrote “She…worked with the actors to ensure that the vision she had for the characters and the characters the actors created were similar, while not imposing choices on the actors” (Golla 1). Another student wrote, “I felt like my ideas were always heard and that I could explore my ideas freely” (1), which is always one of my top goals. Several noted my “clear vision,” which is interesting to hear, in that I do not expect the artistic product to live up to a standard in my imagination, which is what I think of when people say that about directors. Some may have meant that they felt secure in my leadership ability to guide the production to a meaningful culmination. A couple of statements spoke to my attention to taking care of the collaborators’ well-being during a strenuous process. Other single mentions included enthusiasm for working one on one, the rehearsal ritual, my kindness, and working on visual elements of the show.

The major area of improvement identified by the respondents was communication. Prof. Golla relayed that a theme from “actors and designers alike, was that they felt like often they
were expected to, or having to, try to ‘read your mind’ (a phrase used by several respondents)” (Golla 2). This sentiment was supported by student statements like, “Sometimes I got frustrated working on a scene because I wasn't entirely sure what she wanted all the time” or, “There were times where I couldn't see exactly where she was going with an idea” (Golla 3). When I consider this feedback, I would readily admit that there were several times at which I did not know where I was going with an idea, or know what I wanted all the time. I am curious about the students’ tolerance for uncertainty in a leader, and how that fits with the idea of the director having a “clear vision.” I am not sure how the undergraduates conceive of a director’s “vision” in relationship to her artistic process. Some of the statements seemed to not allow for the director’s process to have a journey, such as “I would say Jessica should improve on defining blocking because there were times in the early process of rehearsals when the blocking was too loosely organized and I felt awkward and unsure” (Golla 2), which is something I would consider to be a part of the discovery of rehearsal. Another said, “I got new information later than usual when I could have effectively used my time elsewhere in the design process if I’d been told earlier” (Golla 3). Another wrote that it was hard to fix something when I didn’t always give a reason for not liking it. Again, I would consider these uncertainties to be within the bounds of the director’s discovery process; as long as the director is actively looking to identify the thing he doesn’t know or like, he does not need to nor always should have the answer for how the actor or designer should “fix” it.

More pointedly, designers and crew members, and some actors, responded that there were times when I was very “passive aggressive” toward them. “Passive aggressive” is a difficult term to extract meaning from, because the definition in our popular imagination varies widely. Passive
aggressive behavior is characterized by indirect communication through behavioral cues or a masked way of expressing covert anger.

When I try to put myself in the respondents’ shoes with these responses, I imagine that it was frustrating to feel that they did not understand what I wanted. Students may have thought I was looking for a correct answer from them, as though I knew it but was withholding it, when engaging them in Socratic dialogue. It is possible that students did not understand that I was sincerely looking for their ideas and thought processes in answer to questions about the production. In the case of actors making low stakes decisions, I could understand how they might feel I had a correct answer they had missed if I offered a suggestion on how to raise the stakes of their own answer. This negotiation is always a delicate one, and involves a lot of trust on the part of the director and the student. It doesn’t always go one way, either: there were times when the student’s answer gave me a new understanding of her conceptualization, and I supported it. In the case of designers and production staff, I am not sure they were convinced that I was trying to activate their problem-solving and creativity without telling them what I wanted, or that it was uncomfortable for them to work in that way and would rather be told what to do. On the extreme end of the spectrum of responses, one student wrote “She hides behind a smile when she’s being mean” (Golla 2). Returning to the definition behind passive aggressive behavior, I recognize that there are times I was angry with collaborators during the process of *Appropriate*, but I definitely held myself to a standard of dealing with them directly when I was. I think there may be confusion for students around the productive role of conflict in an artistic process, and the difference between conflict and anger. Between Megan and I, for example, conflict led to anger, which is not ideal. However I imagine students may not have experience with a leader who is
angry with the situation, but instead of choosing to express that anger on a student, attempts to work with him on how to troubleshoot the issue. Unquestionably, the anger is uncomfortable for both parties—it may even cause an uncomfortable smile—but it is unreasonable to expect that anger will never arise. We must try to untangle the knot together.

My takeaways from these surveys is that there are a number of ways in which actors felt creatively free and supported by the “clear vision” of my direction, but that I can always communicate more clearly with all members of the production team about my expectations of how the process of working together should ideally go. Particularly at the beginning (but with reminders throughout), I can let students know that I am discovering our production alongside the rest of the team by integrating the talents of everyone around me toward the direction my personal compass is pointing me toward the show. With students, it may be useful to remind them that I as director do not always have a right answer, and that I do not consider that to be my job. I would like them to feel that we are finding an answer together, and that I cannot find the answer without their input. In asking questions I am trying to understand how they conceive of the situation at hand, in order to arrive at the most richly synergistic artistic solution—something I can not arrive at on my own. In giving my input or guidelines to collaborators, they need to feel that they can tell me when they see a problem, or if they are not able or willing to complete what I am asking for without fear of reprimand. It would likely be helpful to verbalize that I intend to work up to and through opening night, which may entail additions and adjustments late in the process or in reaction to audience response. Finally, I am curious about new ways to address the idea of conflict in the artistic process and to communicate those preferences to a production team as a whole. Is there a discussion that illuminates the idea of creative tension, wherein
collaborators are in, at times, necessarily opposing roles (the director adjusting the order of sound and light cues for a transition, and the stage manager trying to record those cues)? Is there an exercise to practice the idea that productive conflict, when worked through intelligently, creates more artistically sophisticated outcomes than one person winning and one person losing? Is there a way to communicate to a team that people get angry sometimes and that it is possible to handle anger professionally? Can I get better at acknowledging when I am frustrated with someone or concerned about a production element in an even more swift and straightforward way?

9.5 Student Post-Production Interviews

The actors I surveyed responded positively to the rehearsal process, drawing attention to the environment created though the rehearsal ritual and warmups, and the feeling of having their own freedom of expression within or beside my clear idea of the show as director. Emma said at times my challenges and expectations of her were “hard as hell” or felt disproportionate in relationship to the rest of the cast, but “I realized I was stronger,” she said, and upon further reflection, knew why I was asking a lot of her and set her worries about my treatment of others aside. We agreed that our areas of creative tension where we didn’t fully agree was valuable, expanding both of our conceptions of the play. Brandon called me an “true actor’s director” (which I have never been called before, since I as choreographer I am often seen as someone who imposes structure from the outside).

Brandon and Meghan, the stage manager, said the outreach process helped them work through their feelings about the larger issue as part of a cohort, and that going through a learning process about race with his peers was helpful. Meghan said the outreach process was “a good
way to immerse myself in the show,” bringing “another level of seriousness” that she wouldn’t have had otherwise. She also stated that she wouldn’t have gone out of her way to get those kind of experiences on her own. Emma said the outreach gave her additional consciousness about the play and added to her ability to create the imaginary circumstances for herself. All three loved the physical exercise we did with painter’s tape (see “Auditions/Casting/Rehearsal”) and found the way it changed their bodies (or watching the actors bodies be changed) to be illuminating.

Emma shared an instance where I had judged her character by telling her “This is where you go crazy,” as less helpful. She also told me that receiving notes after opening shook her confidence and made her self-conscious when she wanted to be able to let go and experience the character’s journey based on the work we had crafted together.

Meghan loved the process, although she recognized it as labor intensive. She felt the topic was important and felt good about working on a show with important social value. Our daily debriefs after rehearsal kept us on the same page and my expectations of her were clear. Meghan felt the workload I expected of her was in the upper range of what was possible for her, but she accepted that and was willing to let other things slip because the show was important to her. She knew that if she felt overwhelmed, she could come to me to adjust as necessary.

Meghan was unclear on the school’s expectations of her in relationship to the rest of the backstage crew was unclear, and felt that that others in the backstage crew felt that as well. She thought it was unrealistic for me to expect that they would be able to organize themselves to create the “backstage choreography” needed for costume changes, prop placement, and scenic transitions on their own. Meghan expressed that if she were in the ASM’s position, she wouldn’t have been able to lead the crew to create the scenic transitions by herself. She did feel that
running crew were included as part of the overall production team, and noted that they were asked to participate in our rehearsal ritual when they were available to do so. In future productions, we discussed the possibility of a public transfer of responsibility from the director to the ASM upon running crew’s arrival into the process, so it would be clear to the team that the director would not interact with the running crew. Meghan noted that some felt my expectations of the backstage/production crew were impossible or unfair for a student with a full load of classes, compromising their health and wellness. Another production team member, Elijah, said “it was so much work,” and conceded that he felt pushed to his personal edge by my expectations and collaboration with him, but stated he wanted to do everything that was being asked of him. He knew not everyone had the same connection to the show or interest in being pushed. Elijah felt everyone could not help but be pushed to their personal edge by the topic of race. Seeing race everywhere now is not always a positive experience for him. Sometimes it makes him angry, he shared. It’s clear he was changed by the experience and sees the world differently as a result.
10. Post-production Responses (Self)

In the following chapter I evaluate my work on *Appropriate* from a variety of standpoints. I first examine strengths and weaknesses of the production and its process; I then move on to lessons learned as a leader or teacher. Next, I explore lessons learned as a director, and finally, I expand on things I might have done differently.

10.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

With *Appropriate*, I was able to create the space for actors to explore fearlessly, but in moments compromised the strength of my production team and some designers by not slowing down to take care of their success trajectory in the way they needed. Directing realism on proscenium was harder than I thought and demanded hard-won staging solutions, which eventually paid off and opened up new, engaging staging horizons for me. Pacing for the show was never completely resolved, and at times the emotional cadence was general, one-note, or unearned through authentic exchange between actors. However, individual performances represented personal bests, and the ensemble was cohesive. Despite challenges in the working processes, the show’s design was strong. The show’s strength was informed by the academic and enrichment activities around race and privilege that deepened participants’ commitment to the process.

In one way, I felt the success of the production in the way it hit its target at the first performance. The loud vocal responses of the audience members expressing horror or shock at the specimen jars, the gasp at Rhys’ celebratory (and horrifying) racial slur, and the reveal of the hood let me know we had crafted a ride the audience was fully on. Creating trust and dialogue in the rehearsal room was the engine behind the scenes that allowed the *Appropriate* team to take big risks and make bold choices to support extreme characters and circumstances. With
adjustments from me, actors were able to pursue high stakes choices and use their imaginations to illuminate connections to their given circumstances and acting relationships. Even though there was not a lot of movement in the show, the body as my “way in” often had me up on stage, tapping into bold physical impulses through the characters’ points of view, sharing the problem with the actors in a kinetic/visceral way that opened doorways to new possibilities.

Inspiration to risk boldly came partially from the research Kalā and I provided to fuel actors’ imaginations, my personal connection to the play shared at the beginning, and the amount of work and thought actors saw had been put in by Kalā, Elijah, the designers and myself before day one of rehearsal. Mun’s fight choreography, coming early on in the process, showed actors on a visceral level how far we were going to go in developing these characters’ rage at one another, and how that would manifest in actions both ridiculous and brutally violent. This choreography provided a vision of where we would eventually end up that actors could glimpse from the very beginning of their process. The commitment each actor brought to the process was key to our success, with seeds sewn at the one-on-one meetings I had with each person.

Finally, adding the actors and production team into the outreach experiences planned let everyone know from the beginning that they were participating in a play with a larger, urgent message, which they responded by taking the show seriously and finding new reserves of creativity and risk to bring to the project. Through work we did outside the rehearsal room in attending group activities and creating the panel/post-show discussion event, examining our own dynamics of race and privilege as an ensemble was impactful. Confronting and at times interrogating our own relationship to race with the assistance of a variety of consulting voices, such as Dr. Rebecca Gaudino, Kevin Jones, Lesli Mones and Lisa Grady-Willis gave our work
on the play an accountability and urgency we would not have had otherwise. Outreach activities gave all of us a rare feeling of knowing that together we were creating art within our convictions, and growing as people during the process. Assistant director Elijah Fisher went above and beyond to help me coordinate all of these activities, which I would not have been able to manage without his help.

As is often the case, my greatest strength was also my greatest weakness. Getting actors to commit fully and pursue their objectives with abandon was my number one priority, and in combination with my muscular directing style, I spurred them into 0-100mph scenework. I would like to have emphasized listening and responding as much as risk taking in this process. By the last week of rehearsal I saw the cost of this pushing in how much the ensemble had lost building a moment together, each person adding to the house of cards with her line in response to the last person. In the future I would like to have a game or exercise, or maybe simply a stated principal to return to in moments like that one which cues listening and reacting. It could be physical or textual; it would necessitate taking in what your scenepartner gives you in order to react.

In conceptualizing the show’s movement before rehearsal, my goal to manifest blocking primarily from actor intention and impulse was an inefficient approach. Knowing what I know now, I would have anticipated the characters who needed to be most highlighted beat by beat, and worked toward keeping them positioned to avoid upstaging. Allowing the actors and myself this level of freedom to discover moments was a worthwhile goal and brought about good information, but caused me to have to revise a large percentage of the show’s movement halfway through the process. When I find myself in this situation again, I will approach it with a clearer
idea of who the main focus through the major beats of the scenes and have strategies in my back pocket.

Outside of actor work, I wish we’d had more time with the hoarding aspect of set dressing in rehearsal to inform the scene work, another point brought up by one KCACTF respondent. Megan and I may have both underestimated how much thought and planning this dressing would take, and other scenic elements took precedence. I was lucky to have an extremely smooth and proactive costume collaboration from my perspective, manifesting in a solid and evocative end product which helped to differentiate ages and helped to determine character arcs.

Ideally, with regard to our outreach activities, I would have loved to have had another teacher or leader’s supportive voice to facilitate student integration of learnings. We had time for short, informal discussions of experiences like An Octoroon or Hands Up, but I wish I’d had more time and expertise to help students unpack their impressions. I am not an expert on identifying my own unconscious bias and unintentional insensitivity to inclusion in the current climate—I was struggling to identify my own triggers and bias as much as the students were, and did not feel a lot of mastery over opening up conversations when we found it hard to communicate on the subject.

On the design and production side, I wish I had a better sense for knowing when collaborators were struggling at their edge and had stopped to inquire rather than marching on and wishing that they would pull themselves together. I was dragged down into personal conflicts as a result of disagreement and territorialism over how to use time in our last week. I later saw some students had interpreted my requests as insensitive or unreasonable, or that I was continuing to try new ideas close to or past opening for collaborators who wanted to be finished.
The snarl with Megan Macker culminated in her telling me she’d felt under-appreciated and hurt by a lack of positive feedback for several days, and by the time we had this conversation she was angry and emotional. I was not moved to give her positive reinforcement at the moment in our collaboration when it seems she needed it most. Relations deteriorated further as she stepped into the middle of a conflict around transitions for running crew, which was another issue I unfairly expected students to resolve without my help.

10.2 Lessons as Leader/Collaborator/Future Teacher

I finish the process of putting *Appropriate* up feeling confident about my ability to work from text as a primary source of inspiration. I committed to a language heavy play and followed the thread to its furthest conclusion, using the characters’ intentions to bring the relationships to life and mining the conflict through realism. Exploring and taking pleasure in Branden Jacobs-Jenkins’ version of realism in this piece offered me a learning curve in terms of staging techniques and finding a theatricality which was juicy for me. After opening night, responsive and invested audiences were a satisfying conclusion to an experiment in working out of my comfort zone.

I will never be able to control all collaborators having a positive experience of working with me, but I can work to create conditions that will up the likelihood that collaborators feel they can do their best work in a healthy working relationship with me. I always want to cultivate healthy communication with collaborators and let them know that we have a two-way responsibility to speak directly to one another about the work in front of us, the challenges in our path, and the scope of expectations for how we will work together, as well as how conditions change throughout the process. Reinforcing this more explicitly, finding new ways to have these
conversations, and taking the time for more frequent check-ins along the way could help to prevent disconnection. Helping students know I do not always have the right answer, nor am I expecting them to guess what it is, may convince them that our production requires their input to be successful.

In a larger sense, I am thinking about my expectations and the edges of individuals’ comfort zones. My aesthetic inclination is often to reach farther and higher than you think you are capable of, both in choices on stage and how I work within the process. I have learned that this is my bias, but not everyone enjoys working in this way.

Artistically, I was constantly asking for more, asking actors to be uncomfortable, to push their choices farther. This was necessary in my point of view to elevate the staging to the style the play demands, and to extract the theatricality of the play instead of constantly undercutting it with choices that were comfortable. Prof. Golla and I discussed a misconception that some University actors have that comfortable choices equal natural or “real” acting on stage. From an outside perspective it is easy to see that comfortable choices for student actors are not always the strongest ones. In pushing past actor comfort zones, I created an artistic product that was mostly strong but at times felt forced or too extreme.

As a collaborator, this same equation proved itself to be true. I recognize that individual students may have felt forced past where they wanted to go at times. I believe there is pedagogical value in this to an extent: students can discover that they are capable of things they did not think were possible for them; some find the reward in what it means to be fully committed to a project. However, it is never my intention to push a collaborator into territory they do not willingly want to go, or past healthy boundaries. I can work on stating that more
clearly, especially if students are in a power dynamic where they feel that they cannot be honest with me or say no to me because it will reflect poorly on their work as a student.

The big lesson I take away is learning a balance between the expectant action of asking for more, and the supportive action of providing for student growth. Can I hold each of these actions in hand, ready to use them both?

Looking specifically at the situation with Megan, I find myself re-examining my use of positive reinforcement. I'm usually very liberal with positive reinforcement, but I was not moved to give it to her at the moment, it turned out, she needed it the most. From her point of view, I see I was ignoring the work she had completed, which was substantial. But the set dressing was later than I had expected, and when it arrived it was not quite up to the level I had hoped. How can a leader make sure they are giving positive reinforcement fairly and truthfully for work they may be underwhelmed by? If I had been able to find a place or time to acknowledge Megan’s victory in a meaningful way at the right moment, it might have made a pivotal difference to her.

10.3 Lessons as Director

Throughout the process I was learning staging techniques I thought I already knew, but realized my experience on a large proscenium stage had been with stylistically elevated material than realism. As days went by, I experienced a series of realizations about what it means to do a living room play that I had not fully grasped at the beginning. After feeling like I was stuck in one environment, I found a way to escape it and dig into the virtues of what this genre did afford me.

It seemed from my vantage point during the process that students didn’t have the control over lines necessary to pick and choose tempos, since we barely got to what I thought of as an “acceptable” minimum pace by opening. In fact it was only with great difficulty could I get them
to slow down when necessary, as if the inertia of the moving train was too powerful. However, perhaps a more careful and mindful conception of tempos on my part as I began each scene (or revised it from the rough block) would have resulted in calibrating many scenes at one time, instead of getting the whole play to a gallop by opening and then running out of time to add subtlety in across the board.

With regard to design and production, I see that I need to have a better understanding of what’s been communicated to student participants from the outset with regard to expectations and responsibilities. Explicitly stating a couple of guidelines could help provide boundaries that keep every one safe, such as setting a cutoff date for changes to design elements, or stating to the production team that I would like to make adjustments through opening and asking if they have the bandwidth for that. I can also ask collaborators at the beginning of our working relationship to come to me as they notice timelines change over the course of the project that create discrepancies between the desired deadlines and what is possible. The larger concept at play here is to more explicitly align expectations with collaborators’ consent from the beginning, and to normalize the idea that priorities and deadlines change over the course of a process; what’s most important is to stay in communication, not to hold anyone accountable to impossible tasks.

10.4 What I might have done differently

Artistically, two moments in the show escaped our best possible outcome: the timing of the masturbation sound cue with Rhys’ action, and the size of spectacle of the destruction ballet. However, I feel that for both of these moments we got as far as we could with the time and resources available.

Thematically, I wish I’d been able to articulate a couple of points more clearly in our
production. One of them was the philosophical message behind the cicada song, “they have this memory of a song that they think is just a part of them…” (Appropriate 41), which was obscured by my staging. Because I chose to aim Cassie’s delivery of this information at the goal of impressing/seducing her cousin, some of the sense of those questions was lost. This is an important expression of privilege which comes through the natural world.

Secondly, thematic questions of what defines family were obscured. Cassidy tells River that she didn’t know her Grandpa, and expresses how strange it feels to be related to a stranger “just because you share some genetic material” (Appropriate 30). She argues that if you accidentally share the same amount of genetic material with a stranger on the street, “You can’t call them Grandpa” (30). Toni further explores the improbability of a concrete family structure, pointing their “mismatched memories.” When she tells her brothers that “we don’t seem to be on the same page, memory-wise.” And if they can’t get their “stories straight,” as she puts it, then what is family for? Toni says, “All this life you live—what’s it for if no one’s there to tell you about it? To hold on to it and then give it back to you? To remind you of the things you forgot or never knew you even knew? I always thought that was what family was for (55).” If our perception of shared family history varies radically between siblings due to differences in parenting that occur between children, or events that shaped the course of that history but that affected each child differently, families find they do not share the same past at all. This breakdown of what supposedly defines relatedness—shared genetic material and memories—tears down a sacred institution with a savagery that did not fully land in our production.

Further, I don’t think I fully understood what Toni was saying after that until after the show was over. After telling her brothers she plans to depart from the family via a pretend death,
she warns them, “And I just hope we never find ourselves wondering where a certain memory or feeling is coming from, because now we’ll just have to make something up. Though maybe that’s what you’ve wanted all along. If so, congratulations” (Appropriate 56). In rehearsal I thought this was just another biting tactic of Toni’s, but in performance I saw that she is telling her brothers that their shared history is made up—each of them have made up their own story about what their youth and their parents were, and the brothers expect her to believe theirs, or they don’t care what the truth really was. This idea supports the postmodernist outlook which initially attracted me to the play: there is no one objective truth. This is an idea Toni cannot reconcile.

Toni suspects that the brothers prefer to believe their own versions of the story, regardless of what she calls “the truth.” In the next beat, she tells them she must leave; it’s implicit is leaving the false memories her brothers want to call their past. In this way, Toni rejects a “pretend” family in favor of learning how to love.
11. Conclusion

A rewarding actor rehearsal process, in combination with a rigorous and enlightening outreach program, combined onstage for a rich, holistic arts learning experience which manifested onstage in bold choices and full commitment by the actors. My personal bias toward pushing past comfort zones was rewarding for some and uncomfortable for others, and has revealed to me how much I need to emphasize receiving and authentic response in scenework as a counterbalance to my inclination toward athletic extension in my work. This bias at times compromised communication and working relationships with a couple of participants, and the tech experience in particular became fraught with misaligned expectations on the design and production side. Actors had largely positive experiences and delivered strong performances in which several performers surprised University faculty members with their growth. My learning curve involved staging techniques for realism in proscenium, working through actor intention, and identifying the need to apply a sophisticated and confident approach to pace instead of an eleventh hour push fueled by insecurity. My major goals for the show were fully realized through the bold experimentation in the rehearsal room and from the responses of our audiences, not only during the performance but afterwards in the comments relayed to our team. Our design and production team contributed excellent work, but particularly in the scenic department, did not feel fully valued or affirmed in its execution. I conclude my work on this production thinking of how I can in the future better craft a sustainable working model for all participants.

The relationship between experiential learning through outreach activities and artistic expression in rehearsal had a symbiotic, additive effect on our process. Educating ourselves on the historical and contemporary effects of racism deepened our commitment to the show, and
allowed a more 360 degree view of characters in the play. Exploring our own white privilege informed our interactions with the show by being able to identify with the characters while condemning their mistakes. This education gave us the leeway to bring out the humor in these characters through awareness of their faulty thought processes. Students were able to give support to one another as they watched Hands Up or An Octoroon, learning together about subjects they had little exposure to and felt were important, but would not have sought out an opportunity to study on their own. Investing our time deeply into these activities made our actors more aware of social issues than the characters they were playing. At the same time they knew they were in turn expanding the audience’s awareness of its own racism. Speaking to actors, educators and facilitators working in the field of racial equity informed and leveled up their artistic experience of doing the play in ways they couldn’t have accessed without contact with these larger outside perspectives. I posit that the weaving together of artistic experiences in rehearsal with enrichment and academic experiences concerning race and privilege outside of rehearsal is what created a production of Appropriate that participants, supportive collaborators, audiences, faculty, and KCACFT respondents had largely positive reactions to.

While I was able to immerse myself in the goals for myself implicated in choosing Appropriate, at the project’s conclusion I found I had only scratched the surface of using language as the driving force of a piece. Though I missed having music as part of a theatrical experience, it was interesting to live in a world absent of it. It would be fascinating to go even further in putting my attention almost exclusively on the power of language as the chief theatrical weapon in the works of Beckett or Shakespeare. When I began the project, I thought my goal would be about letting intention guide blocking but in practice, it was about cultivating
intention to unlock the play while employing strategies for staging realism in proscenium. Learning the visual grammar of this style was a journey, starting with me thinking actors could follow their impulses to create the most “organic” staging possible in a static, realistic setting. By the end I learned how false or artificial the act of playing realism on proscenium must be in order to make the action visible to the audience (as compared to thrust or arena), and got better at finding logical reasons that would lead the actors into sharing their language and reactions with the audience in visible ways. Finally, I found a way to infuse staging with my personal sense of beauty in places through spacial relationship and composition/behavior of bodies in the space we call home.

I succeeded in getting actors to extend themselves further than they knew they could go, but did not put an equal focus on specificity and their sense of listening and responding authentically in each moment. I saved notes on pace for the end, but could have attended to the tempo of each scene more specifically from the beginning. As we began tech week, my working relationships with design and production personnel deteriorated. I was not able to stop and adjust my production pace to take care in creating the circumstances for a smooth and successful scenic transition by my backstage crew. Further, my expectations clashed with those of my scenic designer, who said that due to my lack of positive reinforcement, she pushed herself past the point of healthy boundaries in working on the piece and felt unappreciated. My expectations were not aligned with my props master, who chafed at my requests and eventually refused to go on. There may be others on design and production side who disliked the level of my expectations and/or attention to detail.

11.1 Goals
In revisiting the team’s goals set out at the beginning of the process for audience takeaway, our goal of making the audience complicit was achieved. KC ACTF Respondent Mace Archer said that he worried if he laughed or feel sorry for them, he would be implicated. The university community told my faculty that our campus needs more of this kind of challenging, political material, and that now is high time to open up this conversation at the University of Portland.

We also hoped that our audience would leave wondering if Ray was racist. In practice, as mounting evidence about Ray was revealed, audiences went down a slippery slope towards believing he was racist. One attendee of our talkback discussion commented, “What more evidence do you need?” and wondered why the family was so deep in denial. Despite feelings about Ray, the play definitely lacks resolution and left audiences on a sustained note of questioning, from what I heard of post-show chatter.

My goal with the cast was to employ “reckless play and relentless invention,” to “support actors playing boldly…using a psychological or realistic frame to help motivate them.” These goals were achieved, along with my aims to help them “try things that seem outlandish,” in order to work toward “earn[ing] breakthroughs they didn’t think were possible.”

With my design team, my goal was to create a complete and realistic world that the actors could buy into for their imaginary circumstances. I wanted to bring the “presence and character of the house” to life, as well as its transformations. By opening night, the world—from the massive artifact of the house to the unrelenting pulse of the cicadas—was made complete. The costume plot deftly distinguished the ages and perspectives of each individual within the interrelated group, and our lighting design created a realistic standard from which to deviate from in moments of nonrealism, to dramatic effect. Props that needed to have the most impact
stood out within the busy visual field of a house in chaos.

Another area of focus for me was to effectively contrast the play’s realistic genre with the poetic gestures specified in the script, and in our treatment, these elements achieved a quizzical breakage of audience expectations. The cicada sound cue beginning the show made an impression which began the night with a definite warning that the rest of the evening held the unexpected and unexplained. The fight scene succeeded in surpassing reality and became the perfect setup for the gut punch of the KKK hood. The second cicada sound cue allowed transportative magic to take centerstage after the excruciating last scene, soothing and smoothing the transition from the world of humankind into the the world seen from a distance. In an ideal world, the destruction ballet of the final scene should have been a breathtaking spectacle which changes the speed of time. In our version it was a series of non sequitur actions which were each a little too small for the size of the stage. However, we were able to culminate the scene into a kind of hysteria through light and sound. Audience members I spoke to were often perplexed about what the final scene as a whole was supposed to represent. Those that derived meaning thought it represented spirits haunting the house, or an evil influence expressing itself through the house. No one I spoke to reflected my interpretation of the future death of racism, so in this respect our goal for the final scene was not achieved.

I conclude the project humbled by aspects of my process that I can improve in the future, and proud of the success we achieved. I have a better sense of some blind spots in my theatrical lexicon, as well as how my work habits and communication can create negative impact for participants. I also have ideas for how I can practice and improve in these areas. However, my deepest desire was achieved: creating trust and dialogue in the rehearsal room was the engine
behind the scenes that allowed the *Appropriate* team to take big risks and make bold choices to support extreme characters and circumstances. The energy and bravery that was put forth in our outreach process impacted several individuals’ perspectives on a deep level, and brought issues of inequity and privilege to light in our community.
Appendix A-Dramaturgy

*The Voices of Minorities at UP* was the lobby exhibit created by student dramaturg Kalā Müller during the run of *Appropriate*. The idea for the exhibit, as Kalā explained in his written statement presented alongside the visual presentation (reproduced below), came about from Kalā’s question of where he, as a Hawaiian-Swiss man, fit in the discussion *Appropriate* raises (see “Auditions/Casting/Rehearsal”). When Kalā shared this feeling with me, I immediately thought of some of the clubs Yuri Hernandez Osorio had encouraged me to get in touch with to encourage inclusion around the show. Together, Kalā and I quickly brainstormed the parameters of an experiment: Kalā would write a short, three to five question survey and gather approximately five interviews from three to four multicultural clubs for a total of 15-20 survey responses. Kalā reached out to several clubs on behalf of production, prefacing his invite to the survey with the quest “to know what it's been like to live and interact with other people in a heavily white area like Portland.” He gathered student responses from MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil de Chicanos de Aztlan), FASA (Filipino American Student Association), VSA (Vietnamese Student Association) and Hawaii club, as well as leveraging his personal connections. The questions touched on issues of alienation from the culture of home, and assimilation to new environments:

- What does this club mean to you as a minority student?
- How do you maintain your connection with this culture when you're away from it?
- What does this connection give to you?
- Do you feel the need to "play up" your status as a minority while you're away from home? In other words, do you feel like you have to act more typical of someone with your cultural background when you're surrounded by people who aren't of that ethnicity or background?
- Do you feel the need to assimilate? What is assimilation to you in the context of living in Portland and being at school at UP?

The answers (below) were surprising, at times contradictory, and definitely revealing. It
was valuable information for white people in particular to read, if they had never felt like they were able to ask these kinds of questions to a person they know. Kalā then created a display that anonymized responses and presented them in a nonlinear arrangement, using threads to connect the ideas (see fig. 4).

![Fig. 4. Photo by Jessica Wallenfels.](image)

Below is the statement from Kalā which accompanied the exhibit (see fig. 5).

**The Voices of Minorities at UP**

Kalā Müller, Dramaturg for *Appropriate*

When we began working on *Appropriate*, I noticed that I wasn’t sure where I stood within the questions raised in this play. As a person of neither White-American nor African-American descent, I felt very much outside of the conversation; finding myself in a position of wanting to help, but not knowing how. I realized I existed in the margins of this conflict, and I wondered how many others on campus would be in this same boat with me. I wanted our voices to be heard, for the conversation to extend beyond black and white, and get into the minds of multi-cultured people on campus. I think it’s important to remember people’s stories, and acknowledge that there is so much about the American experience that one cannot simply understand through testimony. Instead, by giving voice to others and letting the conversation extend beyond what is discussed in the play, the potential exists to let other perspectives be heard. It’s a good opportunity to let people in on another side of life that they might not get to experience, but one they can learn about and have a new appreciation for.

These responses were compiled through a series of interviews and anonymous form submission from many different students of many different backgrounds. Within these responses there are a myriad of perspectives from people at UP who identify themselves as multiracial or non-white. Their experiences of race are unique, but they also are very telling of the feelings and thoughts of many students of various perspectives and races.
Fig. 5. Photo by Jessica Wallenfels.
I wish I could place more of a priority on maintaining my Vietnamese-speaking skills and taking part in the various Vietnamese festivities that I used to go to during my childhood. Though, I usually connect back with my Vietnamese roots nowadays whenever I get the chance to go back home during the school year to visit my family.

I connect with my culture through cooking, listening to music, and reading about the history and current events happening in Mexico.

[On maintaining cultural connection] I get Spotify playlists with songs from when I was growing up, including some straight up Hawaiian songs. I also find myself chanting in the shower sometimes...

I talk about my culture with other students who come from the same background as me.

I maintain my connection with this culture by listening to Mexican music, cooking and eating Mexican food, writing to my family in Mexico, talking in Spanish with my family over text, taking Spanish classes, finding ways to bring my cultural values to campus/campus ministry and standing in solidarity with those of my same culture (such as helping run an event for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, standing up for DACA, etc.) and also by talking about my culture and my family with the people around me, especially my closest friends.

Personally, I use media to stay connected and tied to my culture. For examples, I might watch TV dramas that are within my cultural background and language or listen to music where the language is my cultural background. And, I personally have the luxury of living off campus so customs (meals, speaking my native tongue, etc) are still within my personal cultural background.

The connection that I have with my Vietnamese culture has given me a sense of open-mindedness, acceptance, and appreciation towards other people who may also be different from the "culture-norm." Being able to learn how to accept my cultural differences has also helped me in learning to accept other
aspects of myself that may differ from others, such as my sexual orientation.

It [my cultural connection] makes me feel closer to my ancestors and reminds me of why I should feel proud of my heritage.

[My cultural connection] reminds me of home and the community that raised me.

This connection [to my culture] allows me to remember my responsibility as a student and Hawaiian. I have a responsibility to bring good skills and knowledge back to my community in Hawaii. With these skills, I hope to find better ways to help my community by giving them more opportunity and ways to sustain our Hawaiian culture and way of life.

It [my cultural connection] makes me feel connected to my mom even though I'm far away.

It [my cultural connection] gives me a reminder of who I am and what I grew up believing and valuing. It also serves as a reminder of where I come from and a sense of belonging when I feel like I don't belong.

Being able to still partake in my personal cultural gives me a sense of who I am--and I don't find that I need to "hide" it. By staying connected and embracing my personal culture, it makes me feel that my values and cultural upbringing isn't wrong when I felt that it was while growing up.

I don't think I feel like I need to play up, I'm just more aware of it (my status as a minority). If anything, I feel the need to show that someone like me is just as capable, hardworking, knowledgeable, etc. as someone like them (people who fall into the majority)

I used to feel like I had to play the role of the "Smart Asian Kid" especially back in high school. However, I have found that keeping up that persona has been exhausting and damaging to my self-confidence, so I have learned to not feel the need to pretend to be someone that I am not.

I never feel the need to act more Samoan, but I am never afraid to talk to others about my culture.

Yes, especially because I am mostly white. I sometimes feel like I have to prove I am who I am to others and even myself. A lot of the time I can feel completely unconnected.

I do not. I actually try to stray away from [acting MORE Mexican], and I'm not sure if that's a good or bad thing. But, a lot of the reason why I don't do it comes from the fear of being stereotyped as a "typical Mexican" because Mexicans tend to have a very bad reputation. Surprisingly, even with all this political turmoil, as of lately I do like people to know that I am PROUD to be Mexican; I simply wish I wasn't so afraid of being stereotyped because there are so many things I don't share with or do around people because most of them don't completely understand my culture. And so many things about my culture are so unique and amazing to me and are things that make me proud of who I am.

… there are moments where I feel that I have to speak up for my cultural background due to misunderstandings or bringing in a new cultural perspective.

I try to act more whitewashed around white people so they have a more positive view of my ethnicity. I try to make it so that if they consider news about people with my background, they are less likely to be bigoted
or negative in their thoughts and actions and give people a chance.

[I don’t think I need to assimilate here.] When I think of assimilation here, I think of the smaller things; like not using an umbrella. But also, if I take on the perspective from my culture, I am assimilating by being here. (Because I am far from home and living on my own while getting an expensive education when I could go to a much cheaper school).

I do feel comfortable at UP to simply be myself without needing to force out some expected behavior based on my cultural differences. However, I do believe that my "assimilation" into the college-life at UP has definitely made me disconnected at times from my Vietnamese culture.

I have felt the need before. Assimilation was mainly learning to live in an environment. To assimilate in college, I had to adjust to living somewhere else than my island. Any student must learn to keep an open mind to changes.

To me, assimilation in Portland and at UP means seeing that there are so many different types of people in the world. It's also seeing that there is so much opportunity for experiences on campus and within the city. These include trips to other states and countries. I've been on a bunch of plane trips during college and a lot of them were because of programs at UP.

I feel as though I need to assimilate to a more digestible version of myself.

I [used to feel] like I was being watched by the dominant culture for how "Mexican I was"-- someone always made a comment about the food I brought to school from home, my lack of English vocabulary, the way I dressed/did my hair, the habits that I had, etc. I didn't think those comments affected me much but now that I'm thinking about it, I definitely do subconsciously feel the need to assimilate because of them.

…In all honestly, I feel pretty blessed to be in a household and in a community where I can pick and choose what traits I want to take on from the dominant culture and from my Mexican culture and that I don't necessarily, now, feel pressured to assimilate myself into someone I am not.

I feel comfortable with acknowledging and embracing an American identity along with a Chinese identity and almost code-switching between the two at times.

I tweak my personality and behaviours to act more like the people I'm interacting with. In the context of being at UP I feel like the more I cater to white Christian people in my actions, the better chance I have at fitting in and becoming less of a stereotype to people around me.

My Filipino comes out extra when I’m in Portland, like, I don’t want to be lumped in like, “he’s just another minority, he’s just another person of color.” Or I don’t want them to be like, “this guy is super Americanized.” Like there’s a subconscious need for me to define who I am, and make myself known as not just another Filipino, but one who understands and respects the culture.

I don’t wear my ethnicity on my sleeve because it’s cool, I do it because it’s a part of who I am.

I feel like I’m obligated to understand and be able to explain the fun parts of my culture, as well as the things that make me ashamed to be a member of my culture.
People expect you to know everything about your ethnicity. I pride myself on knowing the answers, but it’s weird to be expected to have all the answers.

Assimilation isn’t a bad thing. Everyone wants to fit in; everyone wants to make friends- As long as you don’t lose sight of who you are, or what you’re working towards.

… not everyone is going to understand what your experiences are as a person of color, and expending your energy on trying to make everyone understand is only going to lead to frustration. It’s also important to note that no one can take those experiences away from you.

Other responses not included in exhibit:

I used to be ashamed of my mother's foreignness - the way she spoke, the things she would make me for lunch at school.

I've finally come to love everything about my heritage, and it makes me want to allow others to feel the same.

I don't, actually [feel the need to assimilate] - I feel like I hide it more without meaning to.

My father is white and I am pretty white-passing, so I am treated as a white person, and I have allowed that to become my status on campus - just another white guy.

I don't really bring up my race unless it comes up in conversation, and people often act surprised. I don't "act" Asian, and most of the people I hang out with are white. It's an odd feeling.

Because I am half white, half Asian, I feel that I have to act more typical of someone from my culture when I am surrounded by people who are of the same background. Conversely, I am guilty of exoticizing myself when I am around people who aren't of my ethnicity. I'm not proud of it, but I think that everyone is trying to stand out from the crowd somehow.

I do [feel the need to assimilate]. To assimilate for me means to truly be in touch with your whiteness - to only hang out with white people, to only do or talk about "white" things, to not publicly partake in activities or eat foods that are particular to your culture for the sake of not standing out. It's sad, really - I wish I was prouder.

Although Portland is a largely white city and UP is a largely white university, I have been fortunate enough to not feel the need to assimilate. I think that Portland is interesting because it emits an attitude of acceptance, tolerance, and solidarity, but their population doesn't reflect that.
Appendix B-Red Door Project Facilitation Approach

On two occasions, members of the *Appropriate* student moderation team met with Kevin Jones and Lesli Mones of The Red Door Project for consultations on facilitating race-based conversations with groups connecting through theater events and in educational settings (see “Outreach, Part 2”).

The mission of Red Door Project is to change the racial ecology of Portland. Jones has a theatre background as an actor and director and has worked at several local theaters as a respected artist and activist. His business partner and wife, Lesli Mones, has spent her career in business settings as a facilitator and consultant, and was a founding member of The Process Work Institute of Portland.

**Definition of Facilitator Role**

Facilitation, as Jones and Mones approach it, is the art of easing a process. Where a teacher or trainer takes a class “from the unknown to the known” in terms of knowledge, a facilitator takes a group of people “from the known to the unknown.” In this way, a facilitator opens up the issues between people without attempting to provide answers or solutions. A facilitator’s job is not to take a one sided or social activist position. Instead, it is to hold space for a wide variety of reactions. The intention is to harvest a variety of differing viewpoints within a group, not to create harmony. Every person in a facilitated discussion has a viewpoint, yet every person is bigger than their own personal viewpoint. Conversely, every viewpoint is bigger than one person, and needs help getting filled out with human faces and personal experiences.

A facilitator respects different perspectives, not pushing his own. A facilitator models understanding and tolerance by sending messages, both spoken and nonverbal, to the group.
communicating that many perspectives, and even conflicting perspectives, can co-exist in the room. As facilitator, you are trying to free up a spirit in the room to speak.

**Overview of Facilitation**

Facilitation is a huge responsibility, according to Jones and Mones. Such responsibility demands that conversations—particularly around salient issues like race—need structure to be successful. Jones and Mones described their chosen structures for the post-show discussions after *Hands Up* in further detail later in the session. As a final overarching rule, the two stressed to never facilitate alone, but instead to work in pairs or groups in order to assist and cover for one another as difficulties arise.

The value of hearing a number of perspectives that differ from one’s own comes from better understanding the complexity of an issue, and how it might be viewed by people who have different life experiences and circumstances than your own. Layers of an issue become more obvious when you hear a multiplicity of reactions to a theater event, for example.

“We all walk around with our own reactions to the world,” Mones explained. “When you get to hear all the different reactions, you get bigger.”

Standing in awareness of yourself means you understand your opinions are not automatically “right,” and you have an awareness of the attitude you are bringing to a conversation. Knowing your biases as a facilitator is of utmost importance. Biases are defined as the set of likes and dislikes, preferences and predispositions to people and cultural identities that each person carries with them as a result of his individual experience. Each person then interacts with the world as seen through the lens of her own lived experience, and as a result, no one person’s point of view is completely impartial.
**Bias and triggers**

Jones and Mones urged the University students to get to know and see their own biases.

Examples of biases could be against participants that show anger, or express emotions. Due to an individual’s upbringing, she may have a negative reaction to the participant as facilitator, and unconsciously devalue the participant’s contribution to the conversation. “We don’t expect you to be perfect,” Jones explained, but if a facilitator is unaware of his own biases, it is only a matter of time until a facilitation experience uncovers the facilitator’s bias in front of a group of people.

The unconsciousness of one’s own bias will become apparent to everyone in the room *besides* the facilitator when she brushes over a person’s meaningful comment, becomes flustered with a show of emotion, or fails to call on someone patiently waiting to speak. If a facilitator engages with a person they have a bias against, and that person starts to break down, the facilitator will have a hard time continuing to model tolerance, understanding and compassion in the face of a person she does not agree with.

We build up toxicity around our biases from being unwilling to face them, Mones stated, but in a successful facilitation, you will be facing perspectives you have created a shield against. Self awareness is key to getting behind this shield, and gathering one’s willingness to explore the ideas behind it.

Biases are provoked by triggers. In their use of the word trigger, Jones and Mones mean people, statements or external actions that cause an involuntary, emotional, or irrational reaction. For facilitators, triggers can “activate” them, and can distract him from his larger goal of holding space evenly for a variety of perspectives to be heard and understood. Jones gave an example of African-American elders as one of his triggers. This specific type of participant makes him feel
overly deferential, because it reminds him of his parents and how he was taught to respect elders as a child. As a result he might not ask a critical question to this type of person in a facilitation, or call out inappropriate behavior from them, as he would with another participant. Having this awareness of himself allows him to watch out for it, to see it coming. Triggers are another reason to always work with co-facilitators who can help when you get knocked off your game. You can tap out with your facilitation colleague when you are triggered.

**Skills and metaskills**

The facilitator’s toolkit consists of skills and metaskills. Skills are defined as techniques for conducting a facilitation, and metaskills are the attitudes one holds while using their skills. Using both skills and metaskills in a facilitation raises the likelihood of having a productive conversation. The reason this is needed is that there is a level of complexity when people speak to each other in public that is very different than two people speaking face to face.

One key facilitation skill Jones and Mones shed light on was personifying a host. Their intention is to honor the seen and unseen diversity in the room, welcoming people and their feelings. This includes inviting everyone to stay for a post-show discussion in the show’s curtain speech, and adding an inclusive language like, “I hope everyone stays, everyone is welcome.” The host warns the audience that you will start right after the show. When Hands Up ends, Jones or Mones immediately walk out and ask the audience to turn to their neighbor and share something that stood out to them.

When starting the discussion, the facilitator offers a frame for why everyone is in the room together—in their case, it is watching the theater piece *Hands Up*. This frame includes informing the audience how long the discussion will last. The facilitators ask that everyone be in contact
with their emotions, rather than speaking from their minds. The facilitators clearly state that they will not let any one person dominate the conversation. Facilitators warn that in the spirit of keeping the conversation moving, they may interrupt you—and specify that it’s not personal.

As participants speak, Jones and Mones use the idea of “sorting” to identify what’s in the room. They imagine that each speaker is not just representing themselves, but a segment of the audience. As audience members raise their hands to speak, volunteers move toward them with a microphone. However, volunteers are instructed to withhold the microphones until a speaker has finished, so that people waiting to speak continue to listen; they have found once a person is holding a microphone, they stop listening. Finally, the facilitator keeps to his time commitments, with warnings leading up to the end of the conversation. He then to summarizes the conversation if possible, and thanks participants.

Metaskills also refer to communicating about how communication is taking place. The most basic way to do this is to reflect what is happening in the room. This can mean illuminating patterns that may emerge in the discussion, or zoning in on something happening between two people. For example, if there is a moment of tension between two speakers, everyone in the room has felt it. It is up to the facilitator to name it if you want to move past this moment. One example occurred at the TCG Conference when a black male speaker was upset, another black male responded to him with, “I don’t know why you have to be angry.” The tension in the room was apparent—Jones and Mones call this a “hotspot.” If you ignore a hotspot, the atmosphere becomes difficult. Jones highlighted the metacommunication when he stepped in to say, “It’s not easy for two people of color to disagree in public in a primarily white audience.” Metaskills involve a facilitator bringing the mode of discourse to light.
Metaskills can involve shaping the pace of the conversation. For example, when something poignant happens, if you frame it, it gives people time to absorb it. When you bypass it, people are likely to feel like something happened, but the facilitator can stop, draw meaning from its significance.

Sometimes metacommunications can be elegant, simple statements:

“Does anyone else want to respond to that?”

“That was very powerful, thank you for speaking.”

If someone is having trouble articulating themselves, you can say “take your time.”

Values

Jones and Mones discussed the values held by a facilitation team. Kindness and empathy were crucial values, with transparency and directness next in line. Transparency means not playing the expert, as is often the expectation when someone is leading or teaching a room. Instead, a facilitator shares what’s real for her, such as, “I’m a white woman, I’m facilitating on race, not so comfortable for me.” This can extend into not responding to questions from participants, who want the facilitator to be able to solve the problems of the room. A facilitator might say, “Please don’t ask your questions to us; we are existing in the space with you.” Directness means being able to refer to events with candor, such as “She just cursed, are you ok with that?” Vulnerability they characterized as “being ok with who you are, what you know, and what you don’t know— where you are in your journey.” Openness allows facilitators to get curious. By saying things like, “Why do think that?” or “Say more,” the facilitator is communicating that he values what the participant has to say, even if he doesn’t agree with it. Lastly, both Jones and Mones placed a high value on humor and the capacity to bring irreverence to difficult conversations.
**Handling tough situations**

Students asked about potential scenarios that a facilitator might encounter, such as if a white man chastised a black man for getting angry. Jones provided an hypothetical example of transparency in facilitation by offering one possible answer: “I just notice myself in myself when you say that as a person of color that there’s some part of me that wants to give you what you want, and another part of me wants to smack the shit out of you… I’m struggling right now with how do I allow you to have your say while I’m dealing with my fear.” Mones was quick to point out that a facilitator has to have the awareness to say that skillfully, rather than just unleashing emotion onto the participant. She offered that as a facilitator you can’t let racist statements go by without commenting on them, but emphasized that you don’t want the participant to shut him down, because that just causes backlash. An experienced facilitator might say, “As another white person can I talk to you about that?” If the participant agreed, you might say, “Do you know the racism that’s implied by what you said?”
Appendix C-Race, Power, Privilege

Below is an account of “Exploring Race, Power + Privilege,” the learning event taught by Lisa Grady-Willis, Director of Diversity Education and Learning at Portland State University. The event took place at St. Mary’s Student Lounge at the University of Portland on September 29, 2017. Quotes and reflections are the result of notes I took during the workshop.

Open to faculty, staff, and students, the event attracted approximately 19 attendees in addition to Elijah and myself. Upon entering the space, attendees walked past a large chart which read “I am comfortable talking about race.” There was a line down the middle of the page, and the words “Yes” and “No” on either side.

Even before she began to talk, Grady-Willis asked us to relax and open up to new information. Once participants were seated, she encouraged us to take deep breaths and shake our arms out, demonstrating herself behind the podium. Our bodies react to ideas and feelings before we realize it, Grady-Willis said. “Angst comes in,” she said, “We forget and think, ‘Oh the pain.’” Grady-Willis reminded participants that it is a good thing for us to be doing this.

She asked how many people in the room thought of themselves as a “lifelong learner,” smiling wryly at the overused term. “If you really believe you are a ‘lifelong learner,’ as many in academia say they are, then you will embrace what you learn today, even when it doesn’t feel good.”

Grady-Willis then offered us pens and asked us to individually make a mark on charts she had set up around the room. One was the “I am comfortable talking about race” chart. By the end the chart looked like this (fig. 7):

**Part one**

Grady-Willis made a brief comment about the visual representation of the marks on the “comfortable talking about race” chart. Some, myself included, had made our mark close to the dividing line as a way of saying we were “barely” comfortable talking about race. We laughed as a group about this phenomenon, and she acknowledged our self-awareness and willingness to engage. Grady-Willis then delivered the first part of her presentation which began with a projected slide reading “How to proceed.” Her requests of us as participants were to stay engaged, expect to experience discomfort, speak your truth, and expect a lack of closure. She then moved on to defining terms, starting with the issue of how we define identity. Is it possible there is identity that can be seen on the outside and identity that is only seen on the inside? She
asked participants to write down individually ways you identify which can be seen by looking at you and not seen by looking at you. In defining what a person of color (POC) is, there are spectrums: we call the variables of these spectrums intersectionality. Grady-Willis also points out that there is intra-cultural exchange within these spectrums, some of which we refer to as race.

Grady-Willis asks the group to define diaspora, and most of us fail. She defines it as a scattering or dispersion of people with a common place of origin. What’s interesting is the phenomenon that even when people are scattered, they may exercise a collective political voice.

People who identify as white often categorize others as POCs—creating a racialized grouping without acknowledging their own race. What is race? she asked, moving further into a defining the slippery terms of our discussion. In scientific terms, there is only one, human, race—homo sapiens. However, this term refers to a broader category than is usually meant in casual conversation.

Race is not biological, Grady-Willis clarified, but a social construct. We group people together by how they look. This grouping process, or racialization, served the European agenda of conquest and colonialism. In contrast to race, the word ethnicity refers to commonly held national origin, language, culture or religion—not skin color.

But does defining race as a social construct “ignore what is real,” Grady-Willis asked? There is community and kinship created by racial categories, she emphasized. Race crosses lines and is not all about class. Yet most often, the agenda of racialization was meant to dehumanize the other, and reduced minority groups to caricatures such as those typified in early American theater history. On stage, black people were portrayed as lazy, stupid, and inept. Where a white
person was seen as a person, a caricature came to represent the message that “all black people are like that.”

Though such overt propaganda seems naive today, Grady-Willis maintained the persistence of these types of stereotypes. A 2008 experiment by Devah Pager of Harvard University found that blacks were 50% less likely to be hired in a job interview than white counterparts with identical training and behavior in the interview. If the white candidate had a felony record, they became almost equivalent to the black candidate’s chances of obtaining the job.

**Part two**

Grady-Willis then showed the YouTube video, “What kind of Asian are you?” In it, a white man repeatedly questions an increasingly irritated Asian woman about where “her people” are from. She eventually tells him that her family is from Seoul; he then makes several comments about Korean food and sayings. When she asks him the same questions back, he calls himself “American,” then “regular American,” then clarifies that “his people” are from England. At this point the woman unleashes a string of English cliches from “pip pip cheerio” to quoting Shakespeare.

Grady-Willis then asked us to break up into small groups and as a group determine one word to describe the white guy in the video: either innocent, ignorant, or racist. The groups’ answers ranged from ignorant to racist, and in the resulting discussion, it surfaced that difference between ignorance and racism is intention. Racism is intentional, then, Grady-Willis reflected back. Some people made sounds of disagreement: is unintentional racism still racism?

Going back on to the next part of her presentation, Grady-Willis took the group through another series of definitions.
Prejudice and racism are not synonymous. Prejudice is carried out by the dominance of one group over another. Therefore, “Power + racial prejudice + white skin privilege = Racism,” Grady-Willis articulated (noting people of color who are bigoted against others “have something else”—a nondominant group that is bigoted against others cannot carry out that prejudice in action). A connection to power is what turns prejudice into racism. Carrying out that prejudice through the use of power is what creates inequity. Boiling down this equation even further, Grady-Willis projected “Oppression = Power + Prejudice + Privilege.”

Prejudice is easy to point to, but each individual’s experience of power and privilege is variable, or sometimes invisible to them. The reality is we all have spheres of power, and ability to influence (even if its just yourself). “This is not about guilt or shame,” Grady-Willis took the opportunity to remind us. “This is about how we are positional.”

Systemically conferred dominance sets the dominant group as standard. This leads to invisibility of the dominance of the group. Everyday reality doesn’t require that a dominant person identify as part of a group, so that dominance becomes invisible to those that have it. Dominance of this group as a result of the external reality can create an internalized notion of superiority, which can result in a lack of humility.

Grady-Willis then told a story which encapsulated an example of the above ideas, which involved a situation in which she was co-teaching with a white colleague. The white colleague wanted students to use her first name. Grady-Willis preferred that the students refer to her as “professor,” because she felt she “needed” the authority as a black female. The white professor demurred, “I don’t want to play into that,” meaning racist power dynamics. Grady-Willis pointed out to her that because she was of the dominant power group, the white professor got to choose
her relationship to that power. “I don’t get a choice,” Grady-Willis countered. She stressed the intersectional aspects of this example, pointing up that “Different layers of oppression give us another reality.”

**Part three**

Embarking on a new phase of the workshop, Grady-Willis then asked participants to get up from their chairs and visit a number of tables set up behind us in the space. At each table there was a list of questions and a cup full of paperclips (see fig. 8).

![Fig. 8. Photo by Jessica Wallenfels.](image-url)
She instructed us to take one paperclip for each question we answered “yes” to, visiting approximately eight tables in all. Grady-Willis asked us to complete the exercise in silence, and played music as participants engaged in the exercise (see fig. 9).

![Fig. 9. Photo by Jessica Wallenfels.](image)

After several minutes, we’d returned to our seats, holding our paperclips in our hands. Grady-Willis directed us to string them together in a chain, and I noticed she was wearing one of these chains herself in a loop around her neck. As she spoke, the group crafted their clips into similar loops. Some were long, some shorter. How noticeable to us are our “clips,” Grady-Willis asked?

She returned to the charts regarding “Black Lives Matter.” This exercise became an
example of acknowledging what’s real in our society and where action can take place. The first two categories, “Black Lives Matter,” and “Latino/Latina Lives Matter, Black Lives Matter, Native Lives Matter, LGBTQ Lives Matter,” recognize the world in which we live. We recognize that the people in these categories are under siege; the second category embraces the interconnection of oppression.

“All Lives Matter” brings nothing to light with regard to our current realities. If all lives matter, we are all one category. Therefore we are all privileged, and we are all oppressed. If this is true, the two conditions cancel one another out, and we are all off the hook. The distinction of “All Lives Matter” amounts to “being ok with the reality that I can have and others can have not,” Grady-Willis said.

“How do we all get the clips?” she asked, referring to the paperclip necklaces.

In light of the knowledge that privilege gives us access to power, her next question was, “What do you have power over?” Power starts with our awareness of our own privilege. If you are busy denying your privilege and power, you are not exercising it. You may ignore your own privilege, but injustice is still happening. We can instead use the power and privilege we have to achieve aims that benefit inclusion and social justice. In using what we know to use the power that we have, we will encounter our readiness to share and give up privilege so that we may be part of a more equitable society.

**Conclusion**

Grady-Wills dropped a number of signs on the floor. She put the sign stating “Actions against inclusion and social justice” on one side of the space and “Actions for inclusion and social justice” on the other side. She asked the group to arrange the remaining signs, which had actions
like “Denying & ignoring,” “Recognizing, no action,” and “Educating others” in a logical order between the two poles. Our group struggled to complete this task, particularly in the middle of the spectrum. Grady-Willis offered a slight reorganization to create the below order (fig 10).

Grady-Willis pointed to “Educating self”—as we were doing in the present moment—as one of the most important stages between acting against inclusion and acting for inclusion. Many of us get stuck in the “Recognizing [racism], no action” stage just before it. There may be feelings of fear and paralysis with the discomfort of recognizing the prevalence of injustice in our society. Others, like Bo in Appropriate, have a “I’m not the one being racist” reaction to recognizing injustice around them. What it really boils down to is a lack of information, Grady-Willis stated. Without educating yourself, you can’t move forward. Being active in the struggle for inclusion and social justice is not just about stopping your own behaviors, Grady-Willis offered, but can also manifest as a number of activities between “Educating self,” “Initiating & preventing,” and “Educating others.” These activities can include engaging conversations on race, supporting and encouraging others doing activist work, or working to change unjust policies. As we all looked at the signs, she asked, “Where are you?”
To finish the day, we moved away from the chairs and podium setup and stood in a circle. Grady-Willis asked each one of us to say one thing that gives you hope that social justice is possible. In the midst of all of the work we knew we needed to do, 20 statements of positivity converged within our circle. It was an emotional moment for some. Finally, Grady-Willis quickly taught and led us in a song by Sweet Honey in the Rock, and encouraged us to keep singing as we gathered our things and left.
Appendix D-Post-show Discussion

Below is an account of “Of Theft and Destruction: American legacies in Appropriate, A Panel Discussion,” a post-show discussion which took place in the Mago Hunt Theater at the University of Portland on October 5, 2017 following the 7:30 performance of Appropriate. The event was free to all interested attendees. Quotes and reflections below are the result of notes I took during the workshop.

Panel participants included Winston Grady-Willis, director of the School of Gender, Race and Nations at Portland State University; Lisa Grady-Willis, Director of Diversity Education and Learning at PSU; Yuridia Hernandez Osorio, University of Portland coordinator for Diversity and Inclusion Programs; Bill Jenkins, UP director of Employee Relations, Danielle Dillard, president of the Black Student Union; and Brandon Rivera, ASUP president. The discussion was moderated by Meghan Holliday, Appropriate stage manager, Kalā Müller, dramaturg, and Elijah Fisher, assistant director with support from the other members of the student moderation team, Pat Johnson and Brandon Chadney.

Elijah Fisher began the discussion by addressing the audience as soon as the actors had exited from the curtain call. Following up his pre-show announcement regarding the discussion, he stuck closely to his prepared notes as spoke:

Hello again everybody and welcome to the post-show talkback. Please turn to somebody next to you. You each have a minute to talk to the other person about what the play made you think about while the other will listen and then we’ll switch.

After two to three minutes he asked for their attention again.

My name is Elijah Fisher and I am one of the facilitators for this talkback today. I’m joined by our other moderators—Kalā and Meghan up with me, Pat and Brandon out in the crowd. I am a black male, and it’s uncomfortable for me to talk about race, so I imagine that it’s uncomfortable for you as well. But we have to sit in our uncomfortability so that we can learn – so we can grow to something greater. I am also very new to facilitating discussions about race, so this isn’t gonna be perfect.
The audience laughed, and he laughed with them. Elijah explained further.

However, what we want to create is a conversation—a conversation that can continue outside of this room and further into the community. Today, we have our panelists that we call “Racial Equity Warriors” because they, along with us, are working to create racial equity in both our smaller and larger community.

Elijah explained that the conversation would last 45 minutes in total, with about half the time spend listening in on the panel conversation on stage, and the remaining time alotted to hear from the audience about what the show, or the panel, had got thing thinking about. “Understand that we’re not gonna change the world tonight, with this discussion, and definitely not in 45 minutes, but progress is progress,” he stated.

*Panel discussion*

Elijah began by asking the panel for their initial impressions of the play we’d all just watched. Winston Grady-Willis remarked on the silences around the characters’ refusal to challenge anti-Semitic attitudes. He expanded his line of thought from anti-Semitism to racial prejudice against African-Americans, bringing up the horrific torture and lynching of Sam Hose and how it further inspired civil rights activist and writer WEB DuBois. This is an example of how talking about injustice and oppression leads to change. Winston Grady-Willis also shared that from a very young age, he remembered his grandmother telling he and other small children very graphic stories of being enslaved. In his family, the worst experiences had never been hidden away from one another, in contrast to the Lafayettes’ silence and ignorance.

Jenkins remarked that he was struck by the fact that the characters in the play, who are all the same race, couldn’t talk about race comfortably, implying that there was little chance they could have a meaningful conversation with members of a different race. Dillard shared her experience of watching the show for the first time a few weeks previous, at which point she had
anticipated the racism to be “more in your face.” “As a brown person,” she explained, “I got the racism, but I worried that a white person wouldn’t.” However, seeing it in performance that night, she thought it was brilliant how Jacobs-Jenkins had exposed the racism of the characters in such a subtle, symbolic way. Hernandez-Osorio felt the play makes racism a very black and white issue, and doesn’t address intersectionality. She felt this was a slightly dated way of looking at and discussing race. In any case, she noted that campus communities need to first have an honest conversation about our shared history, not just racial tension. Lisa Grady-Willis remarked on the rise in lynchings in the American south which followed the progress of civil rights in the Emancipation Proclamation. She posited that increased violence can be a reaction to progress, thought the characters are having a violent reaction to the progress that is going on around them. She also noted how the experience of live theater allows audiences to enter into discomfort in the darkness, together. “When the lights are down, where we’re willing to go,” she observed.

The next moderation question was about the goals of each panelist’s work in their respective capacities as educators, consultants, and student leaders. As director of a School of Gender, Race and Nations, Winston Grady-Willis spoke about aiming for greater awareness of intersectionality, and connecting it to lived experiences of and for his students. For Lisa Grady-Willis, the goal is to have her work as Director of Diversity Education and Learning treated not a trainings but as consultancies. “Something other than compliance,” she clarified, speaking to how the concept of “diversity training” is often reduced to “a box checking exercise.” She would like to see cultural competence embedded in institutions and organizations at all levels, from athletics to the theater department to administration. Lisa Grady-Willis works to achieve
individuals in organizations asking themselves, “How can I shift the way I do what I do in acknowledgement of the need for increased equity?”

The moderation team asked Hernandez-Osorio and Jenkins how their work is similar or different from the Grady-Willis’, and from one another’s. As coordinator for Diversity and Inclusion Programs, Hernandez-Osorio also champions intersectionality and wants to make sure, for example, that Afro-Carribean people of color “feel seen.” Like Lisa Grady-Willis, “I don’t want to be the checkbox,” said Hernandez-Osorio. She also works to let students lead their own initiatives and actions in clubs and organizations. Jenkins, as a member of the University of Portland’s Presidential Action Committee on Inclusion, clarified that he “has no authority,” but wants to foster “more conversations, more dialogue.” He noted that groups often silo-ed and wondered how to bring coordination to separate the various quarters. Like Winston Grady-Willis, Jenkins also shared a story of slavery in his family, and described how he was descended from slaves who had bought their freedom.

Dillard and Rivera were asked about their goals for the student groups they govern. Rivera, as president of the Associated Students of University of Portland, spoke about his inauguration of a diversity scholarship awarded by ASUP, in addition to the need to “be there for people of color. To listen.” He also wants to address the lack of inclusion of scholarship by people of color in the university’s curriculum. Black Student Union (BSU) president Dillard spoke about her challenges with getting active participation in her club. At that moment the BSU had just four members. “A lot of black people don’t want further attention for being black,” she said, and explained that “speaking for your race is exhausting.” As president, Dillard seeks to hold school administration accountable when University of Portland students are the victims of racist threats,
as had occurred recently through the social media platform Yik Yak.

The final question to the panelists was, “How do you think people can help positively progress?” Reflecting her teaching during the learning event, Lisa Grady-Willis answered, “Recognizing where you are relative to everyone else.” She spoke about having awareness that how we interact with one another reflects the climate of the room. Jenkins advocated for individuals to choose not to be ignorant and reminded the audience, “It’s not about guilt.” Winston Grady-Willis championed the audience’s ability to reach people, and reminded them how important this work is.

Hernandez-Osorio shared a story about her work at the University of Michigan, where she had recently completed her graduate degree. A few months prior to her graduation, students had been protesting about a number of issues and the turmoil of changing conditions was in the air. Dreamers, the moniker for immigrants who were brought to the United States illegally as children, were demonstrating after an announcement about DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) from the Trump administration. Crowds of protestors choked campus, preventing passage of cars in some places. Hernandez-Osorio described how one driver trying to cross the intersection where they were demonstrating became belligerent and potentially aggressive. As a potential threat arose, white protestors encircled the Dreamers, forming a human shield around the minority demonstrators among them. This inspired and symbolized how she thinks change can and should occur: people of color leading the conversation, and white people using their privilege to protect a vulnerable population as it speaks out.

Audience comments

Elijah took reactions from the audience for approximately 15 minutes. Before doing so, he
reminded them to speak from the heart and warned them against “pontificating.” If you go on for too long, we will stop you, he warned good-naturedly. He reminded that in this discussion, listening was as important as talking. He then asked the audience to contribute something they were taking away from this experience.

One audience member wondered if the final scene (destruction ballet) was a poltergeist of “white people’s tears.” Another audience member spoke to Dillard in appreciation of her concerns about the racism would be too subtle for white people to notice. She herself felt heavy with the Lafayette’s apathy toward injustice and appetite for monetary gain, and wanted the characters to set aside their feelings of guilt in order to admit their complicity. Another person spoke about the idea of receiving racial oppression as an inheritance. A student observed that since no character is a hero, there was no “white savior” to identify with. An audience member said, “Toni makes me feel like my head is going to explode.” She felt frustration and anger that the family was spending so much time and energy denying their father’s racism. An alumna noted that although the scenic setup of the house and the objects in it kept changing, the reality of the racism “just keeps coming back.” At the end of the show, “we see another person shutting the door on it.” How and when are you going to look at it, she wondered? Another audience member remarked that she couldn’t stop being aware of the photo album still there in the middle of the room at the very end of the play. It had been in the lake and back, but it still hadn’t been dealt with. Our final comment was from a student who shared that his grandfather was a Nazi in World War II. Drawing a parallel between himself and the children of a possible Ku Klux Klan member, he wondered, “how do you love that person?”
Appendix E-Photos

Promotion

Fig. 11. Image by University of Portland.
Rehearsal

Fig. 12. L-R, Sammie VanNorstrand and Rebby Foster. Photo by Kayli Gribi.

Fig. 13. The cast of *Appropriate* gets a seminar from philosophy professor Rebecca Gaudino. Photo by Jeffrey Braccia.
“Race, Power + Privilege” Educational Event

Fig. 14. Photo by Kayli Gribi.

Fig. 15. Photo by Kayli Gribi.
Fig. 16. Photo by Jessica Wallenfels.
“Of Theft and Destruction” Post-show Discussion

Fig. 17. L-R Yuri Hernandez-Osorio, Lisa Grady-Willis, Winston Grady-Willis. Photo by Kayli Gribi.

Fig. 18. L-R Elijah Fisher, Meghan Holliday, Kalā Müller, Danielle Dillard, Brandon Rivera, Bill Jenkins, Lisa Grady-Willis, Winston Grady-Willis. Photo by Jessica Wallenfels.
Fig. 19. Winston Grady-Willis. Photo by Kayli Gribi.

Fig. 20. Yuri Hernandez-Osorio. Photo by Kayli Gribi.

Fig. 22. L-R Kalā Müller, Danielle Dillard. Photo by Kayli Gribi.
Fig. 23. Bill Jenkins. Photo by Kayli Gribi.

Fig. 24. Brandon Rivera. Photo by Kayli Gribi.
Fig. 25. Lisa Grady-Willis. Photo by Kayli Gribi.

Production Photos

Fig. 27. L-R Brandon Chadney, Rebby Foster. Photo by Gary Norman.

Fig. 28. L-R Emma Pace, Kaylie Haas, Pat Johnson. Photo by Gary Norman.
Fig. 29. L-R Brandon Chadney, Emma Pace, Sammie VanNorstrand, Joe Flory. Photo by Gary Norman.

Fig. 30. L-R Emma Pace, Pat Johnson. Photo by Gary Norman.
Fig. 31. L-R Joe Flory, Brandon Chadney. Photo by Gary Norman.

Fig. 32. L-R Joe Flory, Kaylie Haas, Sammie VanNorstrand, Pat Johnson, Brandon Chadney, Patrick Holland, Emma Pace, Rebby Foster. Photo by Gary Norman.
Fig. 33. Featured: Patrick Holland. Photo by Gary Norman.

Fig. 34. L-R Kaylie Haas, Pat Johnson. Photo by Gary Norman
Fig. 35. L-R Pat Johnson, Brandon Chadney, Emma Pace. Photo by Gary Norman.

Fig. 36. Photo by Gary Norman.
Fig. 37. Photo by Gary Norman.
Appendix F-Media coverage

‘Appropriate’ review: all in the family — October 9, 2017 — Oregon Arts Watch

Fall play 'Appropriate' sparks conversation about racial inequality — October 9, 2017 — The Beacon

7 arts picks: Reverend Billy, Mel Katz, dance, theater and more — October 5, 2017 — Oregonlive (The Oregonian)

Appropriate panel 1 — October 1, 2017 — The Beacon (part of multimedia presentation with additional pictures Appropriate panel 2, Appropriate panel 3, Appropriate panel 4, see also “Appendix E - Photos”)

Fall play "Appropriate" to address racism and white privilege — September 20, 2017 — The Beacon
Endnotes

1 Attention surrounding the collection led the U.S. Senate to issue a formal apology for having never passed antilynching legislation. See Senate Resolution 39 (2005).

2 Arthur Miller originally intended Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* to be an everyman-type of figure who stood above race. Later in life, Miller revealed that he did think of Loman as Jewish (see Freedman). Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire* takes place in New Orleans in a racially integrated neighborhood. Williams’ opening stage direction reads: “the music of Negro entertainers at a barroom around the corner. In this part of New Orleans you are practically always just around the corner, or a few doors down the street, from a tinny piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers. This ‘Blue Piano’ expresses the spirit of the life which goes on here.”

3 For contemporary reference, Americans self-described as Black or African American represented 12.6% of the US population according to the 2010 Census (see [https://www.census.gov/2010census/data/](https://www.census.gov/2010census/data/)).

4 After 1969, only 300 neighborhood students would be accepted so that student enrollment would not exceed 40% of any one minority group (see United States Commission on Civil Rights).


7 By 1980, African Americans comprised 9.2% of Tacoma’s total city population.

8 I was deeply struck by Cole’s statement in this session that his goal is to “move the site of
ownership from himself as director to the cast,” and returned to it several times during the

9 I deliberately cultivated positive public relations as a safeguard against possible
misinterpretations, like those I encountered early on.

10 “FEED - Writer & Director of An Octoroon.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Soho Rep, 30 April 2014,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psqmqqvlCS8.

11 Liberating Structures are a set of conversational and meeting rules designed by Keith
McCandless and Henri Lipmanowicz to access the collaborative intelligence of a group. In
contrast to the one-way communication of a presentation or the chaos of an unstructured group
discussion, Liberating Structures game-like step-by-step instructions are meant to “enhance
relational coordination and trust,” and “foster lively participation.” See http://
www.liberatingstructures.com/.
Works Cited


Chadney, Brandon. Personal interview. 27 October 2017.


Holliday, Meghan. Personal interview. 27 October 2017.


Pace, Emma. Personal interview. 30 October 2017.


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