ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: BLACK MADONNA AND MISS AMERICA: IN THE STREETS ON THE STAGE AND IN THE CHURCH

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The black female body is a political body that inhabits the collective imagination of a nation. This body constantly negotiates a multiplicity of meanings that have life and death consequences and in turn teach America about herself. What does it look like for this body to take up space? As the black female body navigates the streets, the stage, the church, both private and public space, what concessions must be made? "*Black Madonna and Miss America* is a choreographic and critical investigation of socio-political happenings in conversation with the positioning of the black female icon in the church, on the stage and in the streets. It is cinematic in nature, employing a familiar series of still and moving images tied to a complex historical canon. *Black Madonna and Miss America* tackles the tension between the public and private; the doing and being of the black female iconic body. The work confronts the worship of the black female body in popular culture; worship undone in the political and economic treatment of that same body." In the making of the work, theory and practice have been lovers, sometimes in harmony, other times, at odds. The practice of making the work in the body challenged and was

challenged by the theoretical work of thinking through and researching related issues; some tangental and others glaringly present. What does the performance protest of Colin Rand Kaepernick have in common with black female bodies engaged in their own political and social choreography on stage? How does #BlackGirlMagic both illuminate the work and threaten its potential potency? What does the work borrow from the Black Church and the Black Lives Matter Movement?

BLACK MADONNA AND MISS AMERICA: IN THE STREETS, ON THE STAGE AND IN THE CHURCH

by

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Introduction

Theologian Karl Barth is noted for contending that a good preacher always prepares a sermon with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. The theological investigation must be considered in relation to what is actually happening in the world as the preacher and congregants experience it. I approach choreography much in the same way. Instead of a Bible in one hand, there is the dance. In the other hand I hold all that I am seeing and hearing in popular culture. The investigation that takes place in the body must be in relation to that same body's experience of the world in which it is situated. Therefore, I interrogated Colin Rand Kaepernick's protest performance, Representative Ilhan Omar's remarks on nationalism, the last days of Sandra Bland's life, as well as the historic win of Nia Franklin and that of other black female beauty queens were interrogated in the making of *Black Madonna and Miss America*. The black female body, my black female body was the main subject; the lens through which I sought to make sense of cultural happenings I could not ignore.

In her book, *Eloquent Rage*, Dr. Brittany Cooper in speaking of the black female body asserts, "(…) our reproductive capacities were conscripted to build the capital base of U.S. empire" (2018, 85). What does it mean that black women's actual physical bodies are fuel for the U.S. enterprise that is capitalism? Beginning with slavery in the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and continuing with Blackfishing in the 21st century? The black female body is a political body. What does Miss America learn about herself in the state and federal government sanctioned treatment of this body?

The conception of *Black Madonna and Miss America* began in my consideration of these and other related queries, initially in conversation and then on paper. However, the discoveries I made in my theoretical research needed to be worked out in and through and on the body; the black female political body. Therefore I began the process of working out the world around me in my literal body: news headlines, the reflections on a film, the pose assumed in an ancient photograph, the meaning of a modern meme. In writing about these headlines, films, poses and other cultural happenings I was not attempting to offer one to one corollaries with the work, but instead offer my embodied investigations of "taking up space" as black and female as part of a larger discussion and treatment of black bodies in public spaces.

In crafting the work, I straddled the line of the real and the magical in order to draw attention to the complexity of identity. I endeavored to script a rounder, more complete story of the black female political body. Black magic is ripe with possibility: blackness as capital, as healing and escape, as transcendence, a mode of celebration, a tool of subversion. There is a magic and wonder alongside realness and familiarity in the work.

> There she is Miss America: strong and beautiful.
> There she is Miss America: magic and real.
> The she is Miss America: divine and human
> (Ronya-Lee Anderson, 2019).

The original song that opens the work illustrates the complexity of the black female political body and names her unique contribution to U.S. empire. The first verse:

> Strong enough to birth this land; wise enough to guard her heart.
> Holding on to legacy; letting go of lies and deceit.
> There she is Miss America: strong and beautiful
> (Ronya-Lee Anderson, 2019).

The black female body; the black female political body constantly negotiates a multiplicity of meanings that have life and death consequences and in turn teach America about herself. Black Madonna, Mammy, Venus Hottentot, The Welfare Queen, Josephine Baker, Anita Hill, Sandra Bland, Aretha Franklin, icon, maid, sex object, single mother. The black female political body can be any one of these things or all of these things depending on the stage, the audience and the script. In choreographing *Black Madonna and Miss America* I set out to create opportunity for black women to inhabit space larger than the space allotted for them in what I call the collective imagination of America. The collective imagination refers to the limited and often stereotypical notions of being ascribed to certain groups of people as evidenced in popular culture through movies, music, news, politics and government, education and finance. These notions of being are uniquely shaped by the history of America, its founding and namely, the enterprise of slavery. These notions of being are false or imagined and commonly or collectively held outside the marginalized group. While the collective imagination of America limits the possibility of being available to the black female political body, in producing *Black Madonna and Miss America* I set out to trouble, arrest and in some cases destroy those limits altogether.

It was never my intention to achieve a one to one correlation between the theoretical research and the practical exploration in the work; however, the two, theory and practice, have been in conversation from the beginning. In the creative process of making the work my physical exploration was often the result of a discovery made during my theoretical research. For instance, what I refer to as the "football section" in the work grew

out of inquiries about Kaepernick's protest performance in taking the knee. I was not interested in re-staging his performance. Instead, I sought to further complicate notions of performance and protest as well as explore formations of nationalism and militarism, redefined in the black female body. Furthermore, it was interesting to me that his protest performance was spurred yes, by instances of police brutality, but more directly following the lead of majority black female WNBA athletes and their public response to those same instances.

At other times the very practical physical explorations and the way they figured in the minds of the audiences representative of and operating under the influence of the collective imagination of America, spurred the theoretical research. For instance, it was quite literally my feelings of discomfort that led me to investigate the power and danger inherent in #BlackGirlMagic. In response to the staged work, one audience member said that when she was young, she lamented being "a bland white girl" and wanted desperately to be a black girl. How lucky we were, she said, that we had Nina Simone and James Brown. Comments such as these led me to consider the complexity of otherness and sameness, the magical and the real. These comments and others like them, led me to investigate further, notions of black femininity as costume, as fashion, as fetish explored in Chapter 2.

Ultimately my theoretical and practical work land in the same place: doing and being in the world. The staged work concludes with the performance of an original song that summons the listener to engage in the action of speech and remembrance: "Say her name. Say her name. We will never forget that she was slain." The written work con-

cludes with a brief exploration of how the embodied research conducted on the dance floor of underground house music events informs how I work in the studio and live in the world. The Black-centered, decolonized space I inhabit on the dance floor is evident through my practice in the studio and performance on the stage. My female black body on the stage, on the street and in the church, in the private and public sphere signifies possibilities for being and doing that transcend the limits of the very narrow collective imagination of America.

Producing *Black Madonna and Miss America* has been a journey of exploration and discovery. As the work took shape its contents came into existence through critical engagement with U. S. current events and 21st century tropes of black femininity. The physical research involved the discovery of a simple canon of movement vocabulary. In the rehearsal process that canon was complicated, interrogated and interrupted. This vocabulary of movement arose from my body as it was situated in the moments of making, my memory of past experiences and movement moments, as well as my present experience of and engagement with, the world around me. It was further transformed on the bodies of the dancers and re-imagined through their memories and experiences, past and present. The work then took on a life of its own, never static, but instead, always breathing and expanding.

Taking Up Space

In the first chapter, I situate my work in relation to a discussion of the black female body in public space. Looking at DC Caribbean Carnival, drumming in Malcolm X Park, and the Second Line in New Orleans, allows me to frame the discussion as part of a

larger one about the control and surveillance of black bodies in the public spaces of U.S. cities. I intentionally chose to investigate spaces marked by characteristics of African Diaspora cultural practices such as call and response, intimacy, the relationship between music and movement. The performers engage in these specific practices throughout the work.

The DC Caribbean Carnival makes room for me to consider the threat of the black body in public space dancing, singing, screaming and shouting, sometimes aided by strong drink, always aided by the bass of the drum. This public space houses moving black bodies which include black female bodies often overtly sexualized and adorned, even revered. This storied space includes my own past experience and makes room for my present reflections on those memories. Drumming in Malcolm X Park is a very significant mainstay of the black community in the nation's capital; a practice that began in 1968, is a particularly fascinating site of public movement possibility. Having visited the site and regularly participated in making movement there, discussions around the shifting of that space were especially significant for me in crafting the work.

Finally, I included a brief discussion of Second Line Dancing of New Orleans as it offered the possibility of looking at movement in a public space aside from the District of Columbia. I argue that it hints at the national trend of tightening the spaces black bodies can freely inhabit as sites of movement making, noise making, and community building. In the case of Second Line Dancing, I am not a participant, but merely an observer through the brief study of the archived experiences of others.

Black Magic

In the second chapter, I focus on the duality of the black female as magic and real, human and divine. In order to investigate this continuum, I look closely at Blackfishing, the strange case of Rachel Dolezal and the popular hashtag, BlackGirlMagic.

Blackfishing is a term used to describe the phenomena of white female influencers pretending to be black through a combination of makeup, traditionally black hairstyles and fashion (Petter, 2018). I look at the ways that public figures such as the Khardashians' appropriate black femininity for notoriety and commercial gain. I underscore the irony in their worship of black femininity in a larger social context where real black women are often oppressed and maligned.

Rachel Dolezal is a complex figure. I am particularly intrigued by her very literal construction of a black female identity and her efforts to maintain that identity. Her reasons for adorning herself in trappings stereotypical of black femininity are of great interest to me as well. It appears that, for Dolezal, the construction of blackness is a way of escape from the pain and shame of her childhood. From blackness, she extracts for herself a healing salve. Ironically, the constructed reality of black femininity that heals Dolezal proves to be dangerous to the black people around her.

#BlackGirlMagic is significant for my work as it pushes me in thinking deeply about seeing and being seen as a black woman, as well as taking up space and owning it. I note that the hashtag creates space for Black women to be in control of how they are viewed, celebrating each other and their accomplishments, aware of, but not presuppos-

ing or pandering to the white gaze. There is something lovely about this space, but also potentially dangerous.

In the work, I straddle the line of the real and the magical, careful to present the dancers as ordinary black women, but also imbued with magic and extraordinariness. In straddling this line, I hope to draw attention to the complexity of identity. I seek to invite the viewer out of the public sphere of seeing and into the private sphere of being for a better look, resulting in a rounder, more complete picture.

Staging Culture

In the third chapter, I investigate the protest performance of Colin Rand Kaepernick through a dramaturgical lens. I posit that his protest is performance and that specific dramatic elements are at play in the making and doing of that performance. Investigating the actor, the script, and the choreography I unpack his performance looking closely at the layers of meaning inherent in each.

Kaepernick's performance takes place on various stages, each with multi-layered significance. The NFL stage is both public and private. Fans can experience his performance from the stadium, the local bar or their living room and in each instance there is possibility for new meaning. The pubic and the private are blurred in his performance. In a similar way, *Black Madonna and Miss America* interrogates the blurring of the public and the private spheres of being. Questions are raised about when the audience look in on the action as outsiders, or when they exist inside of the action engaging from a place of recognition and knowing.

Kaepernick's performance was transcribed onto and repeated by the bodies of many; many who saw themselves in solidarity with him. With each new iteration the original performance act became something wholly new. Some aspects of the movement vocabulary of *Black Madonna and Miss America were* drawn from a close reading of Kaepernick's social movement, in turn creating a new iteration on the dancers' bodies.

Discovering the Body

In the fourth chapter, I look at movement in the church and in the streets to inform how I view the black female body as part of a larger picture of black social movement. I am interested in the relationship between the Black Church and the Black Lives Matter Movement; how these two bodies have moved with and in spite of each other. Dismantling the myth of church and movement as in sync and on one accord, I seek to illustrate the complexity of blackness much in the same way *Black Madonna and Miss America* complicates notions of black femininity. Joy and defiance frame my treatment of the relationship between church and street, worship and protest. I ultimately locate joy in defiance and defiance in joy; each making room for the other. I locate the speaking, preaching, singing, protesting, body in the space between joy and defiance.

Conclusion

In the conclusion I look at how my black female body was stretched and nurtured and sustained in the process of making *Black Madonna and Miss America*. I provide the reader with a glimpse into the world of house music and dance culture as I experienced it. I seek to draw connections between the ethos of the house culture I experienced and the space I created for my dancers and collaborators in the making of this work.

Chapter 1: Taking Up Space

The four women hold hands as they march in time to their own singing. Their bodies create a circle, faces out towards the audience, eyes closed, backs touching. "This land is your land. This land is our land. From California to the New York Island (...) This land is made for you and me" (Guthrie). The women sway from side to side as they move from the tight circle and into a diamond. They continue marching as they sing, repeating "this land was made for you and me". The marching morphs into a very clear stomping pattern that grows as snaps, claps and slaps are layered in. The women become louder, their voices clearer as they begin to tell their stories; their bodies articulating those and other stories. They gather and stretch, grab and push, jump and settle. The sound grows as the movement does too. The edges become blurred as the women move through solos, duets, and as a collective, all while keeping the beat.

"What does it look like for Black women to take up space?"
-Brittany Cooper, 109

Move Over, Sit Down and Shut Up: The Reconfiguration of the Black Body in Public Spaces in U.S. Cities

In *I Want to be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom,* dance scholar Danielle Goldman references Houston Baker's term, 'tight spaces'. Goldman identifies it "as a useful starting place from which to analyze the ways in which one's shifting social and historical positions in the world affect one's mobility" (2010, 6). Goldman uses the term throughout her work as a reference point or frame for her analysis of improvisation. I offer it as a frame for viewing the public sacred spaces inhabited by marginalized bodies dancing, singing, drumming, marching and playing. I investigate the possible link between gentrification and related factors such as location, economics and territoriality in U.S. cities and the gradual disappearance of marginalized bodies moving "freely" in public spaces.

Marginalized bodies have traditionally carved out public spaces to celebrate their cultural heritage and make room for forms of free bodily movement and expression such as dancing, singing, drumming, marching and playing. However, factors such as location, economics, and territoriality have tightened these spaces and in some cases, have led to their complete destruction. Location, economics, and territoriality speak directly to the question of who gets to engage in the practice of cultural heritage and expression where and when, under whose gaze. This research centers on the politicization of the marginalized body in public spaces specifically in the 1990s and early 2000s. I look at how laws are constructed to police and regulate marginalized bodies in public spaces considering for instance, the impact of gentrification and economic development. In investigating the possible link between gentrification in U.S. cities and the gradual disappearance of marginalized bodies moving 'freely' in public spaces, I contend that not only are these spaces public, but that they are also sacred, designated as such by marginalized bodies in response to personal and political trauma often brought on by the state.

My research has led me to define marginalized bodies as those bodies that exist on the fringes of a dominant group or society as well as those who associate with them. In the case of the United States, where my research is situated, marginalized bodies are often black bodies, queer bodies, immigrant bodies, and poor bodies. I choose to focus particularly on black bodies which may simultaneously be queer, immigrant, and poor bodies. These black bodies experience systematic racism and prejudice that deny them equal opportunity in education, housing, politics and other realms of American society. Yet still, my definition is a malleable one that will contract and expand as necessary.

Consider public sacred spaces. Public sacred spaces are often designated by the bodies who choose to inhabit those spaces, either out of need or desire, often brought on by a specific occurrence or event, usually traumatic, that compels the designation of this public space as sacred space. These public sacred spaces are frequently situated in specific locations such as churches, parks, community centers, street corners, and "abandoned" buildings. They are often temporary, inhabited by these bodies only once a week or even annually. Black bodies inhabit these public sacred spaces for individual and communal healing, the celebration of culture and heritage, educational purposes usually tied to the unique position they inhabit in society, and for financial, psychological and emotional support.

Also for the purposes of this research, I have settled on an understanding of gentrification that I will employ loosely throughout the paper. Gentrification, simply put, is the rehabilitation of working class inner city neighborhoods for upper middle class consumption (LeFaivre and Smith, 43). Also at play are location and economic factors as indicated in urban development plans, the practice of no fault evictions, and the presence of the state (Chang 2016, 68). According to writer and journalist, Jeff Chang, gentrification is a word that has "captured urban rage over massive displacement' and does nothing to shed light on its aftermath (2016, 71). It is a relatively simple word for a looming, massive situation that has mammoth effects. In this section I will refer to this term often, but always in acknowledgment of its inadequacy.

I use DC Caribbean Carnival as a starting point for viewing the destruction of public sacred spaces for black bodies that occurred in the United States in the early

2000s. It is a glaring example of public sacred space that did not survive the scrutiny of the state. I also cite Drumming in Malcolm X Park in Washington, DC as an example of an active public sacred space that has survived, but undergone significant change. And finally I cite New Orleans Second Line Dancing as an active public sacred space in danger of destruction, but continuing to thrive and operate in resistance and even at times, because of gentrification and related effects.

DC Caribbean Carnival

If you were in Washington, DC on Georgia Ave, before dark on the third Saturday in June at any point between 1993 and 2012 you would have been unable to deny that something unique was literally in the air: the smell of spices and smoke emanating from the Jerk pit, curry chicken wrapped in roti skins, their smell like freshly baked dough, but better. The pulsating soca music blasting from the speakers and the sound of the steel bands playing would have drawn you in. You would have no doubt been swept away by the hips sashaying and swaying, flags held high and waving, feet marching in time to the rhythm of the drums. If you missed all of that, then you would surely have been caught by the mud people; people covered in mud from head to toe full of mischievous playfulness as they look for unsuspecting revelers to join in their mud dance.

DC Caribbean Carnival was no doubt a lovely cacophony of "feathered costumes, pan drums, flamboyant floats and booming island music," but also a celebration of cultural heritage (Kiviat 2013). My paternal grandmother lived on Madison Street right off of Georgia Avenue and so for much of my childhood the family gathered there to take in DC Caribbean Carnival. Having migrated here from Jamaica in the early 80s, she settled

in the nation's capital to be near her work place. She was a nurse at Howard University Hospital, in fact, helping deliver all of her grandchildren. For my family the carnival was a reminder of 'home,' a celebration of our roots and particularly for the children, immersive instruction on what island life was like. I attended almost every year until I left the area for graduate school and began traveling most summers. Upon returning to the DMV I was disappointed to learn that DC Caribbean Carnival was no more. I was also disappointed to learn that my incense and Black soap shop had disappeared; my favorite roti shop, gone. My aunt who lived on Georgia Avenue, along what had once been the carnival route, was fielding multiple calls a day inquiring about the asking price of her home. It was not for sale. The DC I once knew had changed drastically.

DC Caribbean Carnival had ensued without incident for years. However, in 2011 violence on Georgia Avenue left one person dead. Internet blogs blamed the carnival, not withstanding a statement from the Metro Police Department that the incident stemmed from a neighborhood gun battle and took place hours after the carnival had ended (Kiviat 2013). Following the 2011 carnival it was announced that the event would no longer take place in the nation's capital due to the organization's outstanding $200k debt owed to the city mostly for services rendered by the police department (Kiviat 2013). I should note that in an interview I conducted with the lead DC Caribbean Carnival organizer, Loughton Sarge, he stated that it was around this time, in the last few years of the carnival that the DC police began "treating us like animals" (Sargeant 2018). Note also that as of the date of the interview conducted with Sarge, the organization had not received a bill for the alleged $200k that was owed.

That same year marked the start of significant changes in the demographics of the city. In 2011 Washington DC's Black population dropped below 50 percent for the first time in over half a century (Chang 2016, 80). In 2012 DC was named one of the fastest gentrifying cities in the nation (Andemicael 2017). In subsequent years, in the Shaw/U Street section of city, which includes Georgia Avenue, lobbying by new arrivals not only led to an explosion of bike lanes, dog parks and upscale coffee shops, but also cost black churchgoers a long standing convenience of parking in a school playground on Sunday mornings (McCartney 2017). The landscape was rapidly changing.

This altered landscape was visible in other U.S. cites around the same time. In his book "We Goin Be Alright" writer and journalist Jeff Chang notes that during the 1990s and 2000s, many big cities actively depopulated themselves of people of color and the poor (2016, 68). Chang provides numerous examples. In 2014 in San Francisco techies who had purchased city ordinances for a $27 fee tried to expel brown youth from the soccer fields where their pickup game had been running for years (2016, 66). In September 2015 in Oakland, California police were called upon to stop musicians from playing in a historic African cultural center, and worshipers from singing in two West Oakland Black churches (2016, 69). In August 2017 in Durham, North Carolina police were called to shut down Brazilian percussion group, Batala's Monday evening rehearsal in Central Park across from newly constructed condominiums (ABC News 2017).

The disappearance of DC Caribbean Carnival points to a larger trend in US cities that involves the gradual displacement of black bodies from their public sacred spaces to make room for newly transplanted white bodies. DC Caribbean Carnival was a public

safe space that made room for black bodies to celebrate culture and heritage. That public safe space remained in tact, only minimally policed by the state, until the land was rediscovered by new, white, privileged bodies.

Professor Jean Rahier calls this racialized political and economic space of cities "the racial/spatial" order (1998, 421). Rahier, in her discussion of blackness in particular time and space contexts notes that in Ecuador the 'migration of blacks to urban centers continues to be seen as a threat even when blacks (…) do not act according to racist stereotypes" (1998, 421). She goes on to discuss how the physical presence of black bodies in urban spaces, long designated as spaces for the elite white and white-mestizo of Ecuadorian society, is met with extreme racism. Rahier points out that in Ecuador, society is spatially constituted. Different ethnic groups "traditionally reside in specific places or regions, enjoy different concentrations of economic and political power, and occupy different positions on the national social ladder and in the racial order" (Rahier 1998, 422). American society has followed a similar trajectory, shifting from time to time, but generally with the poor, the black, the marginalized residing in the cities, crime-ridden, drug epicenters while the rich, the white, reside in suburbs with lush front lawns, picket fences and top-notch schools. However, in "Vanilla Cities and their Chocolate Suburbs," a chapter in Chang's book, he notes that the racial/spatial order of American cities has undergone a radical shift with whites arriving in cites and pushing blacks to the suburbs (2016, 76). Chang notes the shift in U.S. cities. The cities house all of the resources and easy access to government agencies and thus political power. The suburbs, in turn are bereft of resources such as healthy food, jobs, public transportation and services offered through

government agencies. In U.S. cities the racial/spatial order seems to be largely based on where resources are concentrated. Rahier offers a framework for understanding the discomfort, the fear that ensues when bodies start moving beyond the bounds of their prescribed racial/spatial order.

Black bodies celebrating cultural heritage in the form of free bodily movement and expression is cause for newly transplanted white residents to call the police. Black playing, dancing, drumming, and singing is in violation of newly designated white space and therefore, has to be relocated by law enforcement. In his article, "The Normative Ordering of Police Territoriality" Steve Herbert identifies the police as those who "reinforce boundaries to restrict people's activities by restricting their movements in space" (1996, 572). Police regularly control social action and construct social order by controlling space. Law both constrains and enables (Herbert 1996, 572). In the case of the surge of police calls by new residents on current residents, the former is enabled and the latter constrained. Both are impacted by laws regulating space, influenced no doubt by the racial/spatial order that governs the society they inhabit.

Chang refers to this clean up as "the politics of containment". He notes that across the United States police departments were given directives to aid in clearing creative cities for gentrification. Black bodies are seen as moveable and removable particularly when they are in the way of the interests of white bodies. The politics of containment starts first with the all out war on drugs and gangs and continues with focus on "quality of life" crimes and nuisance abatement (Chang 2016, 82). Whether they are moving in a gang or drumming in a church, black bodies that are in the way of the interests of white

bodies must be displaced. This practice of displacement brought on by shifts in the racial/ spatial order can lead to the complete destruction of a sacred public site, but can also alter or redefine that site until it becomes almost unrecognizable to the marginalized people who need it most.

Drumming in Malcolm X Park

In the nation's capital, every Sunday afternoon, Meridian Hill Park is a site of drumming and dancing that can be heard and felt blocks away. There is joy. There is play. There is structure and there is freedom. There is church; a body of people gathered in solidarity for healing.

On one of the particular Sundays I visit, there is also, tension. A spatial line is drawn in the positioning of the drummers. The more seasoned ones are in a semi-circle on one side and the younger ones in two short parallel lines on the other side. The two play harmoniously, most of the time. However, at various points in the evening it is clear that they are not on the same page. A friend I have made while there named Daniel describes this space as "forgiving," noting that the Afro-Cuban drummers that meet earlier in the park on Sundays have little tolerance for those unfamiliar with the rhythms and new to art of percussion. I witness the assumed elder of the group shouting at the less experienced members to play in time, to follow, rather than devise their own beat. You can hear him over the drumming "Listen, it's not your party. None of ya'll was here when I got here." And at another point, "If you're not going to listen, then don't play" (Field Notes 2017)! There is a clear sense of who belongs and who does not, of who resides over this designated public safe space and who is merely visiting. Yet, moments later the

elder steps away and a less experienced younger, but apparently regular drummer takes his place.

The founder of this drumming tradition is said to have been Baba Ngoma, the house drummer at the historic Howard Theater. Immediately following the assassination of Malcolm X, as a mode of healing and solace, Ngoma vowed to practice in Meridian Hill Park a few hours every Sunday. Given the significance of the drum for people of African descent, Baba Ngoma was soon joined by other drummers and musicians; dancers too. Over time, what began as a lone practice of healing became a communal one. Meridian Hill Park became Malcolm X Park.

In his article “One Nation Under a Groove: A People’s History of the Drum” Iyelli Ichile investigates the "interconnected significance of the place (Malcolm X Park) and the activity carried out in that place (African-based drumming) for drummers of African descent” (Ichile 2006, 161). He highlights the fact that “drummers of African descent view the African drum as a means of healing and empowerment not only for themselves, but also for the black community.” According to Ichile, “Black people have long considered Malcolm X Park a sacred ground upon which they can openly and unapologetically work to heal their communities” (2006, 161).

William Caudle, a 64 year old DC native, credits the tradition with keeping him clean and out of trouble; creating for him a space to “release feelings of stress, frustration and anger from the week” (Jahi, 2014). However, for Caudle, what was once a very spiritual practice has become “a musical free for all and tourist attraction” (Jahi, 2014). He yearns for what it once was. Ichile laments that the marketing of the park as one of the

most diverse places to visit in the city invites those "gentrifying the area to take a stroll through the the park and observe (…) the people who used to live in the buildings that they now occupy" (2006, 163). Caudle and Ichile are speaking to the tightening of public sacred spaces originally created for and inhabited by black bodies not only as sites of solace, but also as sites of cultural celebration and preservation.

Meridian Hill Park was designated Malcolm X Park by members of the Black United Front which included the likes of Stokely Carmichael and Walter Fountroy (Ichile 2006, 164). William Taft has been a member of the drum circle since 1972. He sees this public sacred space as a way of honoring the ancestors of African-Americans whose masters banned them from playing drums for fear of communication and organizing for freedom (Weiss 2011). Drumming in Malcolm X Park is perhaps one of the most salient examples of self-designated public sacred space by the marginalized. Ichile points to this in his discussion of public memory. He defines public memory as a representation of a society's collective conceptions of the past that is manifested in the form of parades, monuments, holidays, etc…. He notes that in the end it is the dominant class of society, and not the marginalized, that determine public memory (2006, 164). The public memory for Black people in DC and those who choose to associate with them is of a place called Malcolm X Park where every Sunday drummers and dancers and noisemakers gather for individual and communal healing. However, William Caudle and others fear that the dominant public memory might be of Meridian Hill Park (the park's government name), a place where every Sunday you can catch tight-ropers, dancers, drummers and noise makers in action.

This shift in the meaning making potential of public space for the safe gathering and expression of black bodies is arguably underway nationally. The streets, as sites of solace and sanctuary for black bodies, differ from the stages upon which theses same bodies perform. In the next example black bodies perform for themselves, but also for and under the white gaze.

Second Line Dancing in New Orleans

Picture barbecue ribs and fruit punch served liberally amidst the melody of the band and paraders equipped with horns, drums, cowbells, and tambourines. Fancy footwork with canes and other props collide with clapping, stomping, and marching. This is the second line. The second liners are the followers or joiners who fall in behind the "first line" composed of the brass band and the social club members and their followers during parades (Regis 2008, 755). The term second line also refers to the dance steps performed during parades characterized by a distinctive syncopated rhythm (Regis 2008, 755). The second line takes place in the street, but on a very prominent stage. The second line is highly stylized; it is choreographed; it is choreography meant to be joined as much as witnessed. The performers perform for themselves, participating in cultural practice, but also for and under the gaze of the tourist population. The second line is public. It is sacred. It is a public, sacred performance of black dignity actualizing values such as respect, solidarity, peace, community uplift and beauty (Regis 2008, 756).

The racial/spatial order of the second line is significant in understanding its societal function. These parades exclusively take place in the urban, inner city, often blighted and forgotten areas of New Orleans. They are sometimes funeral processionals or memo-

rials honoring the life of a member of the community. Helen Regis, an anthropologist and scholar who has spent a decade studying the New Orleans second line notes that "Dirges, signs, and personalized memorial shirts create a collective space for reflection on the structures that impinge on inner-city lives (…) participation in funerals in New Orleans (…) is a profound way of strengthening and repairing the social fabric (…) severely weakened by poverty, joblessness, violence and race and class based segregation, and racism" (2008, 756). Perhaps this is why the second line appears to be an act of public defiance. Street signs lose their significance during the second line parade. Stop signs and yield signs do not slow the flow of bodies dancing and clapping, marching and stomping. The second line is public and sacred, but also defiant.

Regis also notes that the performance of black bodies in public space in New Orleans is used as a path to economic development in urban areas (2008, 754). The Creole cuisine, historic architecture, blues, gospel, R&B and jazz that draw travelers to New Orleans are produced by the "urban underclass" and the "black working class communities." At the same time, these bodies that perform lucrative spectacle and enhance historic preservation are "increasingly viewed by more privileged groups as the sources of crime" (2008, 754).

The second line is a "collective gesture of memory" that will hopefully continue to be included in the public memory of the New Orleans's streets. It represents ownership of the streets by the working class black people of the city. It brings life to communities otherwise in danger of being seized as spaces in need of rehabilitation and revitalization.

The energy, the life of the second line is what shields it from the immediate effects of the rapidly changing economic, racial, and political landscape it inhabits.

Conclusion

Arguably the space inhabited by those black bodies playing mass, drumming in the park, and dancing in the streets became tighter and tighter not only as new, privileged, white bodies began to inhabit those same spaces, but also as social and historical positions shifted. New Orleans second line dancing has so far escaped this tightening because it is deemed by the state as an integral part of what makes the city a viable, economic hub and tourist destination. As long as white bodies, tourist bodies want a taste of the city in the practice of second line dancing, the public, sacred space will remain un-disturbed. Drumming in Malcolm X Park continues albeit in a truncated, diluted form. The bodies are different and perhaps even the efficacy of the space and meaning brought to that space, but it remains. In the case of DC Caribbean Carnival, black bodies were authorized to perform carnival as long as the location of their performance lacked value. The disappearance of DC Caribbean Carnival coincided with the rapid gentrification of Washington, DC. Once the land there was identified as a source of value, once privileged whites 'discovered' the land, the dancing black bodies had to be removed.

Although the public spaces that black bodies inhabit in U.S. cities closes in, tightened space is still space. Moving forward, black bodies will be forced to do what they have always done: find new space, make new space, claim new space, and reinvent old space.

Black Madonna and Miss America *is an investigation of socio-political happenings in conversation with the positioning of the black female icon in the church, on the stage and in the streets. It is cinematic in nature, employing a familiar series of still and moving images tied to a complex historical canon.* ***Black Madonna and Miss America*** *tackles the tension between the public and private; the doing and being of the Black female iconic body. The work confronts the worship of the black female body in popular culture; worship undone in the political and economic treatment of that same body.*

Using popular culture, musical scores, comedy, interviews and portraiture, equal attention is given to the various aspects of production, including, but not limited to sound, costuming, projection design, and of course, movement. ***Black Madonna and Miss America*** *is interactive in nature, inviting the audience to engage with the world created in the space through sound, sight, smell, touch and taste. With one singing, playing, dancing body as the central figure, three additional black female identifying bodies function collectively to aid witnesses in traversing the work.*

What do Sandra Bland, Korryn Gaines, Beyoncé and Aretha Franklin have in common? They are all black female identifying American-born persons. This is certainly not a new claim. It is one made with eloquence by Jayna Brown in her book ***Babylon Girls*** *and in Dr. Dixon-Gottschild's body of work on the presence of the Africanist aesthetic in American culture. Bland and Gaines died during encounters with state officials. The two occupy very specific space in the collective mind of America. Bland's death came about after she mouthed off at the police; Gaines' following a home visit regarding un-*

paid parking citations. Beyoncé and Franklin do not need introductions, although in reporting on Franklin's death, Fox News mistakenly presented a picture of Patti LaBelle.

Beyoncé and Franklin also occupy very specific space in the collective imagination of America. Black female identifying persons who died during encounters with state officials, occupy very different space. How have black female identifying persons such as Aretha Franklin, Beyoncé, Eartha Kitt and Josephine Baker contributed to American culture? Have they transcended blackness through their rise to iconic status?

The work argues that what we call American culture has been largely shaped by the contributions of black female-identifying persons. The essential question: We have a love affair with the black female aesthetic. This is evidenced in our celebration of artists like Beyoncé for instance, but that celebration of the black female does not reflect in our treatment of black female bodies that are not iconoclized, say like Bland and Gaines, for instance.

All of the women named take up space literally and figuratively, in different ways dictated by the collective imagination of America. I am interested in their value in the private sphere of their everyday lives and in their communities as well as their value in the public space they inhabit simultaneously. While this concept of taking up space in private and public spheres was at the forefront of my mind in making the work, it was not articulated in the rehearsal process. There was however, a freedom of being that manifested in the rehearsal process that I hope was ultimately evident in the performance of the work.

Thinking about the way that black bodies can and cannot inhabit public space in U.S. cities served as a guide in producing ***Black Madonna and Miss America****. Even in casting the work, I was interested in working with black women representative of the multiple possibilities of lived blackness. Working with black women of different hues, with different experiences of blackness, crossing national and international borders, and as a result, inhabiting varied cultural practices, but all in the canon of blackness, was very important to me. I sought to investigate the very meaning of blackness in the audiences' initial encounter of the women and hopefully complicate it in the telling and moving of their stories.*

Chapter 2: Black Magic

The dancers travel from upstage to downstage, their eyes fixed ahead. They walk steadily shifting their weight from right to left then right again. They shift in and out of time with the music, Nina Simone's "Just Like a Woman." Each woman travels in her own lane connected to the others through the similar poses that interrupt the forward movement: standing with hands on hip and buttocks jutted out; sitting with a soft wrist placed beneath the chin and the elbow positioned on the knees. At once and seemingly out of nowhere the dancers repeatedly jump in unison, vigorously kicking the right leg forward and back, pumping the arms. A slow circling of the torso with eyes focused above tempers the outburst. As if resetting from a glitch, they return to their forward journey steadily shifting their weight from right to left then right again.

In creating the portraiture section of the work I conducted some preliminary research on iconography and portraiture, looking specifically at black bodies. Some of the prints I studied were those of the Moors during their sixth century occupation of Spain. Others were of "Black Royalty,". These prints featured men and women dressed in luxurious garments, bold jewelry pieces and often looking straight out at the viewer.

S*tudying these paintings and photographs I was struck by the sense of seeing and being seen evident in the faces of the subjects.* In *Picture Freedom* Dr. Jasmine Nichole Cobb notes that slavery, for instance, functioned as an ocular institution dependent upon black and white bodies being seen in very particular ways fraught with particular meaning (2015, 28). Cobb contends that as the institution came to an end both blacks and whites were forced to develop new ways of seeing and being seen outside the bounds of enslavement. Similar to the discussion of alteritism that follows, Cobb notes that the Black elite began intentionally crafting notions of self through portraiture thus affecting the way they were seen under the white gaze. They began constructing notions of black femininity, steeped in a politics of respectability crafted through "sexual behavior, style

of dress, leisure activity, music, speech patterns and religious worship patterns" (Cobb 2015, 74). *In creating sections of the work such as Crowning and Portraiture, I drew on my research of what I termed contemporary black iconography. Artists such as Solange and Beyonce, for instance, regularly presented themselves in regalia reminiscent of the prints I found as well as photographs of the Black Madonna. In deciding to choreograph a crowning moment in the piece both for myself near the beginning of the work and the other three dancers in the middle of the work, I was thinking of crowning rather broadly. I was drawing of course on the prints of Black Royalty and the Moors, photographs of the Black Madonna, but also the historic wins of Nia Frankin, Miss America 2019 and Chelsie Kryst, Miss USA 2019. In each case, the act of conferring a beauty queen title on a black woman was an ahistorical one. While these specifics were not explicitly discussed in the rehearsal process, they were translated to the dancers through the direction of those sections as well as in the choice of sound score.*

In experimenting with posing, dancers were instructed to distinguish between seeing and being seen. I was very intrigued by one, the (hyper) awareness of being seen, two, looking back at the viewer, and three, the act of controlling how one is seen by others. I sought to investigate the complexities of subject and object in the body; the display and movement of it. What is exchanged in the moment of seeing and being seen between the subject and the viewer? I submit that for black people in America this practice of seeing and being seen is a familiar one due to the constant surveillance and policing of their bodies by whiteness and the state. Black people in America learn very early in life that they are being watched; not always seen, but watched. Gender complicates this reality.

Therefore, I invited my dancers, all black women situated in America, to intentionally engage in this practice of seeing and being seen. The piece that follows further contextualizes the work, providing specific examples of the seeing and being seen that characterizes so much of black femininity in America.

In and Out of Costume:
The Power and Danger of Race Construction in a "Racialized" World

On Sunday, June 26, 2016 actor Jesse Williams received the BET Humanitarian award for his work alongside key members of the Black Lives Matter Movement. In his nearly five minute acceptance speech he spoke very candidly about police brutality, the responsibility of African-Americans to themselves, and held space for the memory of the fallen like Sandra Bland and Tamir Rice. Williams also paid homage to black women for nurturing everyone before themselves and vowed to do better by them (Lasher 2016). This move earned him major credibility with black women as evidenced on Black Twitter; visits to his social media profiles going through the roof. Ironically, he filed for divorce from wife, Aryn Drake-Lee amid rumors of infidelity shortly thereafter.

Nevertheless, listening that night, his final words stuck with me: "Just because we're magic, doesn't mean we're not real." This line points to the strange space between magic and realness that black people inhabit in America, such that they have to continually remind onlookers of their humanity. As if in response to the prevalent use of the hashtag BlackGirlMagic, Williams offered a speech that keyed in on the danger of the idea of magical black people: that they're not real. It follows that people who are not real cannot

be children walking home from the corner store or playing in a park. They cannot be people struggling to make ends meet in need of social and economic justice.

In his piece "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" Kwame Anthony Appiah exposes the dance between Europeans and African traders and producers of art; a dance that necessitates a sentimentalized past and exoticized other (1991, 338). This dance, Appiah argues, is absolutely necessary for the proliferation of capital associated with African art and both Europeans and Africans are complicit (1991, 354). Appiah critiques what is coined alteritism; the construction and celebration of oneself as other. It is this alteritism that creates the value and significance of African art in the West, for instance.

I posit that alteritism is in contemporary practice through Blackfishing, in the widely publicized case of Nkechi Amare Diallo and the popularity of #BlackGirlMagic. In writing about hip hop and rap culture, author Jeffery O. G. Ogbar asserts that perhaps "(…) Blackness cannot be performed;" however, in each of the cases mentioned above, blackness is not only performed, but carefully curated and choreographed to hold up under the scrutiny of a collective outside gaze, one that ironically, often does not account for that of black people themselves (2007, 23). Ogbar's discussion on hip hop culture and race highlights the significance of authenticity or "keeping it real" in the music business. Ogbar asserts that "(…) the notion of authenticity rests on an essentialist premise that presupposes that there are particular traits or characteristics innate to black people" (2007, 30). "The construct of realness" as he calls it, is carefully curated with the right combination of fashion, style, language, and personal history (2007, 39). The prac-

tice of Blackfishing, the case of Nkechi Amare Diallo and #BlackGirlMagic, though different, all rely on some version of a "construct of realness". I am interested in both the power and danger of this construction.

Blackfishing is practiced with regularity in the 21st century, though not without impunity. The term is used to describe the phenomena of white female influencers pretending to be black through a combination of makeup, traditionally black hairstyles and fashion. 'On social media they are curating a performance of themselves that is reliant on appropriating parts of black culture,' said Alisha Gaines, Associate Professor of English at Florida State University (Gawronski 2019). Blackfishers are likely fashioning themselves after the Kardarshians who have normalized racial impersonation, choosing to enhance those parts of themselves that are most phenotypical of black femininity: thighs, buttocks and lips. They also consistently sport black hairstyles like "box braids, cornrows and laid edges" (Gawronski 2019). "Kim and Khloe Kardashian have a net worth of $350 million. Instagram influencers fashion themselves after the Kardashians' cherry picked construction of black femininity to gain brand endorsements and collaborations (Gawronski 2019). However, this construction of black femininity began centuries before anyone had even heard of the Kardashians.

One of the most extraordinary historical happenings around the image of the black female and her magic with most far reaching and longstanding effects, is that of the exhibit of Sarah Baartman as "Hottentot Venus." Sarah Baartman was one of the Khoi people of South Africa. She was put on display in Europe, her extremely large buttocks and genitals, attraction worthy. Although her large buttocks and genitals were an aberration

among her people, other women on the continent of Africa and black women on plantations in America, they were presented as authentically African (Kendi 2017, 137). Operas about the black woman with the large buttocks and genitals were performed throughout Europe in the 1800s. The plot was repeatedly that of a European man being momentarily enthralled with the sexually lascivious African woman and her magical body, only to return to his rightful suitor once the spell wore off and he came to his senses (Kendi 2017, 138). This is where the solidification of the racist stereotype of black women having unusually large bottoms began. This image of the black woman still persists today.

However, it is no longer necessarily imposed from outside the community, but also celebrated within the black community, as evidenced in Experience Unlimited's "Da Butt" released in 1988 or Sir Mix-A-Lot's "Baby Got Back" released four years later. Consider the opening verse of the song delivered Valley Girl style:

Oh, my, God Becky, look at her butt/It is so big, she looks like/One of those rap guys' girlfriends./But, ya know, who understands those rap guys?/They only talk to her, because,/She looks like a total prostitute, 'kay?/I mean, her butt, is just so big/I can't believe it's just so round, it's like out there/I mean gross, look/She's just so, black
(Sir Mix-A-Lot, 1992, 1).

Ironically this opening verse is delivered by an Afro-Latina woman named Amelia Dorsey who dated Sir Mix A Lot for some time and often lamented that it was difficult for her to book modeling gigs because of her large buttocks. In the following verses Sir Mix A Lot declares his love of big butts, turning the stereotype on its head and offering a homage of sorts to all black women. More recently, at the 2019 Image Awards, artist Lizzo, known for the celebration of full-bodied black women, and one herself, performed in front of a large inflated buttocks; her dancers in butt cut out pants. In each of these in-

stances the potential power of alteritism in the context of black femininity is ever present. There is something powerful about embracing a stereotype, celebrating it and weaving it into the construction or re-construction of one's notion of self. It is this power that equips black women to call out and hold Blackfishers accountable for their misdeeds on social media.

The practice of Blackfishing relies on the myth of Black magic. The magic of social media is that you can be anyone you want to be with carefully curated visuals. The magic of blackness lies in the way that it has been distilled, diminished: a zip code, a way of talking, a hairstyle, the size of one's lips or buttocks. That is the dangerous magic of blackness. Apparently it is just a construction, a performance, a costume, that can be donned when necessary and then unceremoniously discarded. The only problem with this logic, this concept of blackness as magic, is that it generally only works one way. No manner of talking, hair bleaching and contact wearing can afford a dark skinned, or even very light skinned black person the magic necessary to attain whiteness. Blackfishing is about capitalizing on the most appealing aspects of black femininity, and doing so with the privilege of conveniently slipping in and out of costume.

Ironically Blackfishing is possible in part *because* black people have by and large participated in the construction of themselves as "other". This is evidenced in many aspects of popular culture, including, but not limited to the arguably necessary "Black is beautiful" anthem of the 60s and more contemporary notions of blackness constructed, for instance through hip hop and rap music. Out of necessity, whether for mainstream ac-

ceptance, an assertion of humanity, for survival, or even for financial gain, black people have engaged in alteritism.

The Blackfisher, in her construction of black femininity, renders black people magic by asserting that these are not the lives of real people she is pilfering, but instead, just images or styles of clothing, ways of appearing and being that belong to all of us. In this convenient construction black people are not real people living daily in the face of dire consequences for donning their cloaks of blackness. In this convenient re-construction black people are just people, who like everyone else have the right to make and remake themselves in the manner of their own choosing without consequence or constraint.

Nkechi Amare Diallo is a woman, an American woman, who's life has been about construction; about quite literally constructing or making things. She draws and paints. She constructs portraits rich with color, texture and meaning. Her hair, her style of clothing, the very pieces of her life; all part of the construction. Most recently, Nkechi Amare Diallo, formerly known as Rachel Anne Dolezal, agreed to pay back the state of Washington $8,850; the amount she was accused of stealing in welfare fraud (Morton 2018). On one hand, this discovery can be seen as just another example of her proclivity to bend and twist the truth to facilitate her practice of convenient construction. You see Rachel Dolezal became a household name in 2015 when she was outed as a white woman living as a black woman. She had all the superficial "trappings" of blackness: the hair, a tan, and even black sons. She went a step further, organizing in her community and ultimately serving as the president of the NAACP chapter in Spokane, Washington.

On the other hand though, Rachel Anne Dolezal being brought up on charges of welfare fraud is in line with a great historical irony. Half a century before Rachel Anne Dolezal, there was Linda Taylor. Linda Taylor was not even pretending to fight on behalf of the African-American community, but she *was* passing as a black woman when it suited her. For much of her adult life, with wigs and other 'trappings,' such as the Black children, she stole and passed off as her own, Taylor lived as a black woman; at least visibly so (Levin 2019). What's more, is that Taylor stole thousands of dollars from state governments through social security and welfare fraud, earning her the name "Welfare Queen;" a derogatory term used even today to refer to poor black women seeking government assistance of any kind.

Both Rachel Anne Dolezal and Linda Taylor went to great lengths to construct a notion of black femininity for themselves without regard for the very real cost to those who regularly and without choice inhabit blackness. They took on trappings of blackness as markers of their credibility. It is difficult to question a woman claiming to be black who has black children or wears hairstyles associated with black women. Of course, for the purposes of this paper I will focus on Dolezal, but it is important to understand her in relation to someone like Linda Taylor; an illustration of the dangerous prevalence and consequences of alteritism.

Nkechi Amare Diallo, was born Rachel Anne Dolezal in 1977 to parents Ruthanne and Lawrence Dolezal in Lincoln County Montana. According to Dolezal her parents were hyper religious and thus very strict, regularly disciplining her and her siblings with corporeal punishment and the age old cruelty of washing the mouth out with soap

(Brownson 2018). In addition to Rachel and her biological brother, Joshua, her parents adopted Ezra, Iziah, Esther, and Zach, all black children. Rachel spent most of her teen years and into adulthood helping to raise them, but also protecting them from the abuse of their parents. However, what Rachel was unable to do was to protect her adopted sister, Esther as well as herself, from the alleged sexual abuse suffered at the hands of their eldest brother, Joshua Dolezal (Brownson 2018). At various points in the Netflix Documentary, "The Rachel Divide" Dolezal tearfully explains that asking her to arrest the black identity she has donned would be asking her to return to the trauma and abuse of her childhood.

Though no less disturbing and possibly more so, the magic of Rachel Anne Dolezal's construction of blackness is unique. While there is always looming in her case the potential of considerable financial gain, fame and other motives, her rationale appears to be rooted elsewhere. It appears that Rachel Anne Dolezal constructed a black feminine identity for herself as a way of escape. The braids, the curly wigs, the faux locs, the tanned skin, her fashion, her work in the African-American community, and her black children, even, coalesce to create a cocoon of safety for her; one that removes her far away from whiteness, her white parents and all that they represent. For Rachel Anne Dolezal, blackness, is ironically, a hiding place from the trauma and abuse related to her childhood. "Nothing about being white describes who I am" she says (Brownson 2018). Dolezal clearly seeks to distance herself from whiteness and goes to the greatest extremes to do so. However, while her construction of blackness is a kind of liberation for her,

ironically, it is a kind of prison for the black people closest to her. In Dolezal's case blackness is the magic of safety and healing, but only for her.

As African-American female writer, Morgan Parker notes in an interview about her most recent anthology of poems, "Magical Negro," 'Black people become magical and not human because so much of Black American life is viewed through characters' (Kelley 2019). To Parker's point, Dolezal, first in her book and then in a 2017 interview, admitted without apology that in childhood she encountered Black people in National Geographic magazines and thought to herself "black is beautiful, black is inspirational" (Olu 2017).

Parker borrows "the magical negro," from film director Spike Lee who first coined the term while discussing films like *The Green Mile* and *The Legend of Bagger Vance*. The Magical Negro is a supporting stock character who comes to the aid of white protagonists in a film. This character usually has all the answers and seems to be extraordinarily optimistic and upbeat despite harrowing circumstances. Their life, for instance, is often far worse than that of the white protagonist they have been enlisted to save. Moreover, this magical negro usually ironically teaches the white protagonist how to be a better person (Glenn and Cunningham 2009, 137). In using this trope to title an anthology of poems that focus on black females in particular, Parker redefines and repurposes it.

The black people around Rachel Anne Dolezal unwittingly function as magical negroes, but without the benefit of Parker's clever re-purposing. They help Dolezal to transcend whiteness, to become a better person, to distance herself from the evil of her biological parents. In the documentary she is shown at rallies and protests repeating the

phrase “my black sons” one too many times. Throughout the film Dolezar continues to make decisions that ensure her preservation at the expense of her “black sons.” She talks about her son Franklin in her book although he begs her not to and posts pictures of her newborn son, Langston (named after Langston Hughes) on Facebook and Twitter, even in the face of continued visceral (Brownson 2018). At the onset of the documentary Rachel’s adopted sister, Esther, has a case pending against their brother, Joshua Dolezal for sexual abuse committed against her as a child. However, in the wake of Dolezal being outed as white and subsequently refusing to apologize to the very community she seeks to be a part of, the prosecutors drop the charges against Joshua Dolezal and dismiss Esher’s case. Moreover, her adopted brother Iziah whom *she* later adopts and refers to as her “son,” makes the decision to go abroad in what appears to be an attempt to escape negative media attention following a college visit to Howard University. Rachel, who could have opted to leave the camera crew at home strolls happily along as the crew films the visit. In each instance, she appears oblivious to the collateral damage of her actions (Brownson 2018. In the words of culture writer Syreeta McFadden, Dolezar is “trying to live a truth of pain and oppression deemed by white people as fundamental to blackness that is (…) rooted in fantasy, a fantastic lie that created (…) difference and harm” (2018). It appears that Dolezal has constructed her own brand of black girl magic and in the process, she has forgotten that black people are real.

First popularized in 2013 by CaShawn Thompson, #BlackGirlMagic presents black femininity as uniquely valuable. The hashtag, born as a way to ‘celebrate the beauty, power and resilience of black women’ has expanded beyond Instagram, Facebook and

Twitter. The magic has been commodified, assigned a value, resulting in the sale of t-shirts, earrings and other items bearing the phrase: BlackGirlMagic. Here, "otherness" is power, creating space for black women to be in control of how they are viewed, how they view themselves, and how their contributions to their families and communities are celebrated.

While this act of alteritism also has the potential to harm, it is unlike Blackfishing and the case of Rachel Anne Dolezal. There is a certain power inherent in the intentional construction and celebration of otherness. However, even in acknowledging this power, one must hold it in conversation with the potential for an otherness termed "magic" to reinforce dangerous historical tropes about the supernatural nature of black women; tropes that made atrocities like slavery and eugenics societally tenable. The idea of extraordinariness, supernaturalness associated with black people is nothing new. Though reworked for a contemporary positive purpose in #BlackGirlMagic, a far more sinister, negative understanding of extraordinary black otherness can be traced as far back as the 16th century.

It was Bartoleme de Las Casas, the son of a Spanish merchant, the Americas' inaugural priest, who first suggested imported enslaved Africans to replace the rapidly declining Native American laborers. His suggestion was supported by claims made earlier by Attorney Alonzo de Zuazo that '(…) license should be given to bring negroes, a people strong for work, the opposite of the natives (…)' (Kendi 2017, 26). Thus was born the myth of the 'physically, strong beastly African and the myth of the physically weak Native American who easily died from hard labor' (Kendi 2017, 27). Although Las Casas'

ideas were initially dismissed, his insistence on repeatedly publishing them spurred the myth of black physical exceptionality that would come to define so much of the attitudes about blackness that are with us even today.

Later in American history ideas of black physical prowess subsisted. The 18th century produced countless writings on the intellectual inferiority of blacks to prevent their equal footing with whites as free men and women. Simultaneously though, writings were produced on the physical prowess of blacks to ensure the continuance of the slave trade. One of the most seminal writings on the matter at the time was penned by none other than America's third president: Thomas Jefferson. "Notes on the State of Virginia" was considered a text that provided reliable insight into the black man and woman as objects; intellectually inferior and unfit for freedom, but physically built for the demands of slavery.

In "Notes on the State of Virginia" Jefferson declares that whites are more beautiful. Perhaps this is exactly the kind of narrative #BlackGirlMagic was designed to counteract. There has certainly been a well laid construction of European standards of beauty that ostracize black women in particular, only taking or borrowing from them the most coveted aspects of their beauty (Blackfishing), while simultaneously denigrating them as "ugly" or "unattractive". This construction of European standards has impacted popular media, seeping into all areas of life, effecting how we see and are seen, who we care for and who we abuse, who we listen to and who we ignore. The effects are real, but "Notes on the State of Virginia" did not stop there. Declaring black people less beautiful could

hardly have been the basis upon which to continue to subject them to the horrors of slavery and injustices that followed.

In "Notes (…)" Jefferson makes additional claims about black Americans that prove to cause long lasting and far reaching harm: Africans felt pain less. They desired more sleep than whites, but required less of it (Kendi 2017, 110). The idea that blacks felt less pain set in motion decades of medical experimentation on them. James Mario Sims, dubbed the father of modern gynecology, is criticized as having literally operated under the racist notion that black people did not feel pain; a notion widely accepted because, after all, it was a notion touted by the third president of the United States. Sims conducted fistula surgeries on enslaved black women without their consent. After four years of experimentation which included 30 operations on an enslaved woman we now know as Anarcha, Sims perfected his technique; one still used today (Kendi 2017, 185). In all of this experimentation on black females Sims did not use anesthesia even when it was available because of his misguided, but presidentially sanctioned belief that black people did not experience pain like white people did (Kendi 2017, 185).

This damaging historical notion of black otherness looms in the background of a hashtag such as BlackGirlMagic, makes the likes of Rachel Dolezal possible and Blackfishing tenable. Perhaps there is indeed something magical and wonderfully peculiar about the women whose ancestors literally birthed, then built this nation. On the other hand, perhaps a more efficacious stance is one that declares not the magic or peculiarity of black women, but instead their substance or reality. In a society where the strength of the black woman has been assumed, expected and taken for granted at every sector,

#BlackGirlMagic seems redundant and potentially detrimental. Ironically, in an attempt to uplift and celebrate the black woman, she may indeed be subject to continued societal abuse and dismissal; after all, she is magic. What's more, is the aspects of her that make her uniquely who she is are conflated with "magic" and thus can be more easily borrowed, mimicked, stolen.

Blackfishing and the case of Rachel Anne Dolezar are relatively clear cut if for no other reason than, the outcry of black women themselves. However, #BlackGirlMagic is complex. It has the power to be subversive. In embracing and celebrating the uniqueness of black femininity black women are able to take charge of the construction of their identity, leaving little room for mainstream white American culture to determine for them how they fit in the landscape of beauty and being. Black people have been forced to straddle the line between rejecting and embracing "otherness" for centuries. In many cases "otherness" can get you killed. "Sameness," on the other hand, keeps you breathing. There are certainly aspects of being that are unique to black people and those should be celebrated. However, it seems equally important to remember that black people are real; real people who bleed and love and feel pain.

One major flaw in my critique might be that it presupposes the white gaze. While Blackfishing and the case of Rachel Anne Dolezal are obviously made possible because of the white privilege of conveniently adopting, borrowing, stealing, mimicking and donning blackness as costume, #BlackGirlMagic is not that at all. The hashtag is only detrimental in so much as mainstream white society denies the humanity of the black woman,

deeming her magical, and therefore, not real, but the hashtag is not for mainstream white America; it is for black women and the communities that support them.

Some days I feel like superwoman. I am extraordinary and can do anything. I feel magical. Hell, I literally sport a gold unicorn around my neck! However, I am real too. I reserve the right to cry, to laugh, to feel pain, to be tired, to be sick and tired. I reserve the right to be both human and divine; a strangely familiar age old claim. I also deserve the right to construct a notion of myself that is line with how I see myself and not how others see me. Oh wait?! This sounds a lot like what someone like Rachel Dolezal would say. I guess we're more alike than I thought. Only problem is, again, I am not afforded the right of slipping in and out of costume. In fact I don't actually wear a costume. There is no face paint; no labor to acquire the curl; no lip injections or butt implants; no squats either. There is no fancifully constructed personal narrative; no children as props. I am who I am, not by the convenient construction of human imagination, but by the deliberate design of the divine. In affirmation I am tempted to shout #BlackGirlMagic, but the white gaze is ever present, so I whisper that to myself daily, but I scream at the top of my lungs, "#BlackGirlReal"! And for the days I really want to be technical, I scream and shout "#BlackWomanReal". So I choose to be magical and real; a confounding, but absolutely necessary double-consciousness.

*In **Black Madonna and Miss America** I am working back and forth between the real and the magical; the sameness and otherness that is black femininity. I am straddling the lines of constructing "otherness" and proclaiming "sameness". I call into question*

the monolithic notion of black femininity and attempt to offer multiple examples that all ultimately inhabit similar or same space in the collective imagination of America.

There are references in the work that resonate with the specificity of blackness; of black femininity as defined from within the community. I am not leaning on any stereotypical ideas or notions of black femininity though they are present even so. I am not leaning on or referencing any tropes of the American collective imagination and yet because of the strength of the imagination, they too are nonetheless present.

In consideration of the construction of black femininity as specific and other I pay careful attention to what the audience, the witnesses of the work will see. In collaborating with the costume designer, for instance, the construction of pieces was influenced by both contemporary and historical images of black female regalia and religious icon which I explore in more depth in "The Dressing Room," through a discussion of the Crowning and Portraiture sections of the work. The movement vocabulary of the work points to the "magic" of the black woman while also calling the audience to reckon with the very substance or realness of her being. The opening song, for instance, "Miss America" contains the repeated refrain, "strong and beautiful". Divine and Human or Magic and Real could be inserted in the song's refrain resulting in the same meaning or effect. The song as illustrative of the larger work asserts the complexity of the black woman who can be strong, but is equally beautiful, who is magical, but also very real, divine, but also human.

In creating the work I draw on the collective experiences of the people in the room as well as their personal experiences. All the women in the piece have had similar expe-

riences by way of being subject to the collective imagination of America and yet vastly different ones, by way of their unique heritages that have a common thread in blackness, but are also singular and specific.

Chapter 3: The Stage

The dancers crouch forward with knees bent, their hands hover over an imaginary ball, their focus sometimes straight out over that ball and other times right at it. They pulse up and down in this position and then all at once in response to one dancer's "go' they lunge forward in a kind of repetitive chug. These chugs thrust them into loping movements. They jump, twist and gather. One by one they fall into a seated pose. Their legs are in a kind of fourth position, their hands tented on the floor, their gaze straight ahead and regal. They remain in this pose just long enough for the audience to register its significance and then with grace, but pedestrian purpose they get up and return to the shelter of the cloud upstage left. They huddle in a circle visibly spent, leaning on and into one another. At the sound of one dancer's "go" they re-arrange themselves and do it all over again.

The Art of Persuasive Performance: The Staging of Cultural Meaning-Making

On October 16, 1968 athletes Juan Carlos and Tommie Smith each raised a black-gloved fist during the playing of the US National Anthem at their medal ceremony during the 1968 Olympics. As a result, they were suspended from the US team, stripped of their medals and re- turned home to the US only to face death threats. On March 12, 1996 National Basketball Association (NBA) player Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf refused to stand during the playing of the US National Anthem citing religious beliefs. He was suspended. He later agreed to stand, but observed a posture of prayer. Nevertheless, he was promptly traded, received less playing time, denied his starting spot and in the 20 years following, received death threats and had his home burned to the ground (Washington 2016). It is this pantheon of black male athletes that National Football League (NFL) quarterback, Colin Rand Kaepernick joined when he first chose to sit during the US National Anthem in August 2016 during a pre-season game.

While Colin Kaepernick's national anthem protest performance did not result in the achievement of concrete social and political change, it was a significant act of cultural

resistance that made ‘issues of violence against Black communities visible’ (Davis 2016, 82). The performance act simultaneously inspired Black America and made White America angry. It was successful in that it garnered national attention and not only sparked a national conversation on police brutality, but also raised questions about the nation’s historic treatment of blacks and the racism inherent in the very lyrics of the country’s anthem. However, after Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf and before Colin Kaepernick, there were Maya Moore, Simone Augustus, Lindsay Whalen and Rebekah Brunson; four women of the WNBA who engaged in performative actions set in motion by the highly publicized shooting deaths of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling.

On July 5, 2016 Alton Sterling was shot multiple times, killed at close range by police officers after they responded to a call that he had brandished a gun at a homeless man soliciting money. It was later concluded that he did not have a gun on him (Workneh 2017). Sterling was just 37 years old at the time of his murder. He was the father of five children (Workneh 2017). On July 6, 2016 Philando Castile was pulled over while driving in Falcon Heights, Minnesota and ultimately shot and killed by officer Jeronimo Yanez. In the cat at the time were his fiancee Diamond Reynolds and their four year old daughter. Castile was only 32 years old. He worked for St. Paul Public Schools. As a cafeteria supervisor he was remembered for knowing the names of the students and even memorizing their food allergies (Sanburn 2016).

On July 9, 2016 WNBA players, Maya Moore, Simone Augustus, Lindsay Whalen and Rebekah Brunson convened a pre-game press conference to talk about police violence. They wore black shirts that read, “Change Starts with Us: Justice and Account-

ability." On July 10, dur- ing warm-up, members of the New York Liberty wore black t-shirts that read "#BlackLivesMat- ter," and "#Dallas5". This led players from other WNBA teams to wear black t-shirts. The WNBA league acted swiftly. On July 13 the league issued fines to many of the players for violating the uniform policy which calls for players to wear official league uniforms during practices as well as before, during and after games. On July 24, following a flurry of social media action, the WNBA league re-scinded the fines and issued a statement of support for players who chose to use their platform to "address important societal issues" (Prada and Ziller 2016).

On August 26, 2016, exactly four weeks later, Kaepernick's performance was noticed by reporter, Jennifer Lee Chan, but it had already been underway for three weeks. Following his protest performance, he was condemned verbally by current and former NFL players. He was labeled a traitor by an NFL executive. Videos surfaced of 49ers' fans burning his jersey and of his jersey being used as a doormat. There were also death threats (Frederick 2018, 4). All of this backlash directed at Kaepernick for his performance, but nothing of this magnitude leveled against the four WNBA players who it seems inaugurated the performance run. So what made Kaepernick's performance of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement and against police brutality such an explosive and meaningful cultural event?

Football is an art form steeped in an aesthetics of performance; one Colin Kaepernick was well aware of when he chose to heighten the performance by putting race and politics center stage in the repositioning of his body. He stretched the performance elements already inherent in the art form, to serve a political and social means of aware-

ness and following, action. His altered performance was not without strategy and a calculation of possible outcomes. If performance is a strategic and tactical tool for social movements to communicate with a larger public and produce oppositional discourses, then Kaepernick's anthem protest is both performance *and* social movement (Juris 2015, 90). Using a dramaturgical approach, I argue that the success of the performance was in the careful consideration of the following elements: the actor, the script, the choreography and the stage. My data set includes photographs, video footage and interviews chronicling the initial performance on August 26, 2016 and subsequent iterations. In this chapter I outline and describe the function of the protest act as a highly structured performance, tracing its success in the role of the actor, the function of the script, the choreography, and the politics of the stage.

A Dramaturgical Approach

Viewing Colin Rand Kaepernick's national anthem protest performance through the lens of dramaturgy hinges on some basic assumptions. First, protest is performance. His protest is performance. "Any practice that involves the production of alternative meanings, ideas, or identities has to be understood as performance" (Juris 2015, 96). Second, there are specific dramatic elements at play in the making and doing of his performance. Approaching the performance through a dramaturgical lens gives great weight to the aesthetics of the performance; the look and feel of it. The staging of the work is inherent in its success as an action of cultural significance. Without the attention given to the elements of drama, the performance is impotent. Only the combination of the right dramatic elements makes the work meaningful and therefore, successful. Third, the use

and manipulation of symbols, audience engagement, and casting are also key to understanding how the performance is situated culturally. What recognizable symbols are present in the performance? How is the audience invited to engage with the performance? Who are the main actors? Careful consideration of these questions frames the performance.

The Actor

In his protest, Kaepernick drew attention to himself, to his body, to his black body, to his black male body. Historically, the black male body in America has been a site of white fear, simultaneously revered and hated. It is a body that must be controlled; a body under intense scrutiny and relentless surveillance. Arguably this body is in a constant state of risk negotiation. Kaepernick's protest was initiated in the wake of the shooting deaths of two black males Philando Castille and Alton Sterling. Their black male bodies were out of line and therefore, punishable by death. In his national anthem protest performance Kaepernick intentionally positioned his black male body out of line. There are however, a few factors that mitigate the risk associated with his blackness. These factors combine to lay the groundwork for a more effective performance.

Charismatic megafauna is the practice of wildlife organizations using large animal species with symbolic value and widespread popular appeal to achieve environmental goals (Pariona 2017). Examples include the penguin, the giant panda and the humpback whale. Kaepernick functions much in this way for the police brutality cause. He is likable. He is lovable. He is relatable. He is like the polar bear of social activists.

Raised by adoptive white parents, Kapernick's biological mom is white, his father Black. His mixed race heritage serves significant aims. A light-skinned, mixed race man openly acknowledging that black people in America are oppressed lends credibility to that claim. Whites generally have more sympathy for and relate better to lighter-skinned blacks (Wilson 2018). Moreover, one can argue that if a light-skinned man is aware of and experiencing racism in America, then the awareness and experience of darker skinned black men must be all the more acute.

Kaepernick wore his hair in afro during the performance run. This appears to have been a deliberate choice, especially since he was photographed before the performance with his hair in various styles, but not an afro. He managed to signal the black power movement with his afro, but in a less threatening manner because of his "good looks," including, but not limited to the shade of his skin. In subsequent photos he is pictured not only wearing his hair in an afro, but also dressed in a black shirt and a black leather jacket, the socially recognized 'uniform' of the Black Panther Party. For whites, his biracial identity operates to make this militant look appear less threatening.

Kaepernick had a clean record at the time of the performance. Naysayers were not able to bring forward any evidence of inappropriate activity on his part; no bar brawls, money problems, or relationship issues. In his book, *This Non-Violent Stuff'll Get You Killed*, author Charles Cobb carefully lays out the function of respectability politics (Cobbs 2014). Respectability politics is based on the idea that if you behave properly, dress a certain way, and remain non-violent, then you will get the results you want. The credibility of the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s for instance, rested heavily on the

respectability of its leaders. Careful attention was given to how protesters were dressed, how they spoke and presented themselves, and of course, how they re- acted to the police and other adversaries. The practice of respectability politics functions as a risk mitigator for blackness in America. The more "straight-laced" the victim of police brutality, for example, the more public sympathy garnered on his or her behalf. Based on the respectability politics model, Colin Kaerpernick was the perfect candidate for the stage.

Finally, during the performance run Kaepernick was a professional football player. Football players are largely viewed as members of a team or club, acting in concert on and off the field for the good of the whole. They are role models, representing the values and ideals of the National Football League espoused explicitly and implicitly by owners, coaches and even fans. This is especially true of the position of Quarterback. Colin Kaepernick was a quarterback and one of only three at the time who were black. He was a well paid, well known public figure. He possessed a type of notoriety that the WNBA players did not, for example. The handsome all- American quarterback was perfect for the part.

Note that my treatment of Kaepernick as actor presupposes the white gaze. His staged performance is arguably one of double operations, to employ a term of scholar Jayna Brown. She uses double operations to describe the multi-signifying practices of dissemblance that made up performances of black female artists from 1890-1920. She notes that while these artists practiced agency in performing for each other and for themselves, they also performed in anticipation and awareness of the white gaze. One performance act, therefore, had multiple meanings. Kaepernick's performance was for himself

as well as other black athletes and black people, but equally for the white audience localized at NFL games as well as those at home watching.

The Script

When American football quarterback Colin Rand Kaepernick began his protest of police brutality by first sitting and then kneeling during the singing of the US National Anthem, it was evident that he understood the significance of his protest, defying the function and parameters governing the performance of the art. When asked about the meaning of the performance, he stated,

> I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color. To me this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder
> (Mandell 2018).

Kaepernick clearly states his reasons for engaging in a very specific protest performance. His statement functions as a kind of manifesto or mission statement. However, before engaging in an analysis of Kaepernick's performance script, consider for a moment performance artist Chris Burden's script for his work *Shoot* (1971). Both Kaepernick and Burden made work in response to violence. Following his performance of the work, *Shoot*, in which he is shot by a friend who intends to graze him, but misfires, resulting in a trip to the hospital, Burden says,

> You see people getting shot on tv everyday, so I wanted to find out what it would be to receive a bullet in my body. But it wasn't really the violence or the pain I was interested in, but the mental experience of being shot at
> (Gleisser 2018, 327).

His words illustrate distance from real threats and acts of violence. In the same year that Burden performed *Shoot* artist Harry Gamboa's cartoon 'Genocide Patrol' appeared in the newspaper *Regeneracion* (Gleisser 2018). The cartoon was created in response to a cycle of riots that resulted in injured and dead Mexican-Americans at the hands of police. Although there is no evidence that Burden's statement was in reference to the violence performed on Mexican-Americans by the police at the time, it is fair to assume that at the very least, he was aware of the reputation of the Los Angeles Police Department. Moreover, F Space, Burden's studio and site of the performance, was located in a low income and crime ridden neighborhood chosen specifically by Burden and his colleagues for the cheap rent (Gleisser 2018, 326).

"Vocabularies of motive" provide compelling reasons or rationales for engagement in protest performance (Gleisser 2018, 315). Although Burden's performance was not explicitly protest, this term can be applied to the presentation of his rationale for action; performance action. Burden contends that he saw violence and wondered what it would be like to have that violence performed on him. In his vocabulary of motive, Kaepernick saw violence and made broader connections between that violence and the oppression of black people and people of color. Ultimately, Burden and Kaepernick illustrate the dance that ensues between the role of the actor and the meaning of the script. Burden's script makes sense when heard alongside his whiteness, his maleness and his art(ness). Kapernick's script also makes sense when heard alongside his blackness, his maleness and his professional-football(ness). Their respective vocabularies of motive

clearly articulate their differences as actors.

Kaepernick's Vocabulary of Motive

"I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color" (Mandell 2018). Kaepernick immediately located his protest in relation to the American flag. He located it in action: standing. He recognized the action of standing during the national anthem with hand over heart before the flag as a performance of alignment with principles and practices of the nation. Kaepernick indicated a refusal to participate in that performance and instead created his own performance. Moreover, he clearly identified for whom the protest performance was intended to provide redress: black people and people of color. The specificity of his language here, his outright naming of the subjects of redress, makes room for black people and other people of color to locate themselves on stage and even further, as participants in the performance. Finally, his words function to interrogate the symbol of the flag, calling into question its association with freedom, equality and liberty. He thrusts the flag center stage to be investigated.

"To me this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way" (Mandell 2018). Kaepernick understood, one, that he occupied and had direct access to politically charged space. And, two, that he possessed capital as a prized black male body who skillfully practiced a highly visible art form in that space. He possessed both capital and risk; risk that was arguably mitigated by the capital. It was risky for him as a professional football player to take that kind of stance and yet somehow his status also operated as a kind of shield. Moreover, by openly acknowledging his position of

privilege on the front end he preempted charges of fame seeking or career boosting, often leveled against celebrity or public figures who take on social causes.

"There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder" (Mandell 2018). His words appeared very cleverly scripted. He did not specifically name police brutality as his major catalyst, but he did not have to. He did not explicitly name police officers as those responsible for bodies in the street, but "paid leave" was a signifier. He did not explicitly call police officers murderers, but again, he did not have to. His performance took place on the heels of a string of highly publicized police shootings of unarmed Black men. The context already created for him, his timing was impeccable (Note that in subsequent interviews he explicitly names police brutality as a focus of his protest and identifies police officers as murderers of black people. However, again, due to the context of his protest performance, he did to have to be explicit in naming the issue nor the offenders).

The Choreography

One of the reasons Kaepernick's protest in its original form gets noticed in the first place is that it draws attention to what is missing or not done. All of the players are standing, but Kaepernick is sitting. He is not standing. His not standing is what signals to the audience that something is awry in the familiar performance moment his (in)action interrupts. Something is awry in the pregame ritual performance of football.

In his protest Kaepernick assumed a dangerous position. He broke formation and thus, became a black male body literally out of line. The very uniform nature of the football performance made this break even more glaring, both for the witnesses and even the

'non-heightened' performers. Reporter, Jennifer Lee Chan, in looking at a photograph taken during a game noted "something is off about this formation of the team during the singing of the US National Anthem" (Morris and Wortham, Still Processing). What she noticed was that one body was not standing; one body was out of line. But this was only the beginning, because the choreography of Colin Kaepernick's performance, as with all good art, would evolve.

Kaepernick's initial choreography was consistently performed for three weeks, but went unnoticed. However, once it became noticed the choreography and the performance of it had to be adjusted. As performer, he had to adapt to unforeseen circumstances (Goffman 1956). Dramaturgical circumspection is the ability to prepare for performances in advance and to adapt an ongoing performance to unforeseen circumstances (Goffman, 1959). Kaepernick practiced dramaturgical circumspection in making adjustments to his performance following a conversation with ex-Green Beret Nate Boyer. The conversation led Kaepernick to begin kneeling on one knee with head bowed during the singing of the national anthem at games, hence the phrase "taking a knee." Though still offensive to many, the modified choreography was arguably more effective. While sitting on the bench could have been attributed to a myriad of things such as illness or injury, kneeling during the anthem created less space for speculation. In kneeling, Kaepernick's body was unmistakably out of line. The modified choreography and the performance of it became more noticeable, thus engaging a wider and more appropriate audience. It inspired Black America and made White America angry.

The choreography continued to evolve in the months following the initial showing. Most notable was the addition of other bodies performing the same movement alongside the principle performer. Moreover, the public, televised nature of the stage rendered the performance repeat- able. Images began to surface of the performance being reenacted not only, by other NFL players, but also by members of the WNBA and even high school students.

The Stage

"Social movement dramas require audiences" (Benford and Hunt 1992, 43). Kaepernick's protest took place in a stadium, seating thousands and televised for the entire nation to view. Post game interviews, media coverage and the function of social media provided further visibility. Social movements in staging protest seek to reach as large a segment of the population as possible. In that respect, the stage of the National Football League is arguably a social activists' dream. The stage is a site of nationalism. It is a site of militarism that functions to enforce that nationalism. And it is a site of colonialist white supremacist structuring; all tied to the economic health of this country.

Nationalism.

Standing still for the National Anthem with right hand over left breast is something Americans are just expected to do. It is the order of things. As early as kindergarten, children are schooled to respect the American flag, recite the Pledge of Allegiance and sing the National Anthem. Everyone stands for the singing of the National Anthem. To choose not to stand is an act of defiance inviting suspicion, queries, ridicule and even threats. However, to choose not to stand for the anthem on the national stage of American

football is not only a direct subversion of order, but akin to offering oneself up for target practice.

Militarism.

The playing of the National Anthem before NFL games began in 1942 when the United States joined World War II efforts. During the war, the NFL made significant financial and human contributions. Players served in the military to help the war effort (Frederick 2018). In 1945, even as the war ended, the tradition continued at the behest of then football commissioner, Elner Layden. In 2009, NFL players began standing on the field for the National Anthem before the start of primetime games. Six years later it was revealed that the Department of Defense (DOD) had spent $6.8 million between 2012 and 2015 on what was coined 'paid patriotism' events before professional sports games. The DOD justified the money paid to professional sports teams as part of their recruitment strategy (Kight 2017). In addition to the singing of the national anthem, the NFL and the DOD partner in the performance of other pre-game rituals such as military flyovers, calls to support the troops, and productions of the reading of the Declaration of Independence (Frederick 2018). Kaepernick's performance existed in direct confrontation of this relationship between the military and football, thus heightening its cultural significance.

Colonialist White Supremacy.

Football is a highly physical, stylized sport imbued with all the signifiers of American idealism: white masculinity, nationalism, strength, courage, bravery, male bravado and fan culture. Football is full of meaning. It is a sophisticated art; one of expression and interpretation, beauty and form. Football in America is more than a distrac-

tion or pastime. It is also about the cultivation of fan culture with the capacity to harvest nationalism and militarism. However, arguably there is also historical dysfunction embedded in the culture. The very structure of the NFL hearkens slavery. The team CEOs and presidents are white men. The head coaches are majority white men. The players are majority black men (Boudway 2017). Moreover, the players, who are mostly African-American, can be traded, essentially bought and sold at the whim of the organization's 99%. That Kaepernick's performance took place in this kind of racially charged space added to its meaning- making potential.

It is this visibility of the stage that most accounts for the cultural significance of the performance. Designed to draw attention to the oppression of black people and people of color, namely victims of police brutality, Kaepernick's performance quickly morphed into something else. A year after the initial performance President Trump tweeted "stand proudly for your National Anthem or be suspended without pay" (Walsh 2018). The obvious irony here is that at the very heart of the protest is the fact that police who kill unarmed Black men do not get jail time, but instead often get leave *with* pay. Following this and other tweets attributed to the President's account, many liberals and Trump dissenters reframed the protest as an act of defiance against the President. The performance act and reenactments of it inadvertently came to be defined by the actions of the establishment; of those in power. What's more is that it slowly became about Kaepernick's right to protest and not about ending police brutality against black people. The very nature of the performance on the NFL stage and all that came with it thrust Kaepernick's national anthem

protest performance into the political arena. It became a tool available for use by both supporters and dissenters of the President.

Once President Trump reframed the performance, it arguably took on more cultural significance. Early September 2017, President Trump called on NFL owners to fire players who refuse to stand for the anthem.

> Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, say "Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out. He's fired. He's fired
> (Graham 2017).

On September 25, 2017 both NFL and NBA teams responded by team owners kneeling and locking arms with their players during the national anthem. This is where the initial protest performance drastically shifted in significance. Initially designed to draw attention to the oppression of black people and people of color, namely victims of police brutality, Kaepernick's performance morphed into something else. On October 15, 2017 Kaepernick filed a grievance against the NFL. He accused owners of colluding not to sign him and of keeping him out of the league. The performance act became even further removed from the originally stated intent. A year later he reached an undisclosed agreement with the NFL and launched a commercial with NIKE (Morris and Wortham, Still Processing).

Conclusion

Colin Rand Kaepernick's national anthem protest performance cannot be considered apart from the cultural context in which it existed. The elements of actor, script, choreography and stage coalesced to make the performance culturally significant. However, most prominent is the stage on which the performance took place. This stage is what

allowed the performance to live and evolve over time. It is ultimately what ensured the performance would reach millions.

Kaepernick's attack on this established framework ultimately resulted in a bolstering and reworking of it; one that will be more difficult to attack in the future. Nearly two years following the initial performance, NFL owners voted to change league rules. The new rules require players on the field for the National Anthem to stand or cause their team to suffer fines. Colin Rand Kaepernick's performance ultimately led to the loss of his ability to play football in the United States. It also resulted in more stringent measures for NFL players. It did not, however, result in less violence enacted on black bodies by police officers. Nevertheless, his performance stood in the face of American nationalism and militarism. His actions threatened the agenda of the Department of Defense.

The choreography of taking the knee is an innocent and even arbitrary act until of course, it is performed by a black man with an afro who gets paid to entertain folks on a stage constructed to reinforce nationalism, militarism and colonialism along with racism, classism, sexism and all the other-isms. In a highly structured performance Colin Rand Kaepernick leveraged the capital available to him with just enough risk to make a powerful cultural statement not only about police brutality against black people and people of color in America, but also about dysfunctional power structures that have persisted for centuries.

The movement vocabulary of Black Madonna and Miss America is full of social movement inscribed on the bodies of the performers and then complicated by their particularity.

In the midst of making the work, I was conducting research on Colin Kaepernick's protest performance and aftermath. The football field became an example of a sort of national stage I was interested in. Again, thinking of the collective imagination of America, spaces whose images made it into the actual homes of America through television sets was of particular interest. Colin Kaepernick clearly identifies as a male, but for me, there was still something to be learned from his engagement in the public performance of football in America and following, his protest dance politically rooted. Moreover, the combination of football as performance, the racialized nature of the sport and and the complication of it all through Kaerpenick's protest was irresistible.

Ask someone to "take the knee". Whether or not they decide to execute the step is one thing, but they will likely know how to do it should they choose to. Naturally, I began exploring different ways of "taking the knee," but that exploration evolved and I came up with a series of drills based on football formations and stances that I asked dancers to perform, explore, wreck and complicate. In my theoretical research I discovered just how much of American football is about a performance of nationalism, loyalty and militarism. I wanted to complicate that using Black female bodies engaging in their own kind of national performance. I think that right away the other women in the work picked up on the meaning inherent in what we began calling the Football section. They immediately latched on to the "doing" of it all; the persistence, the work of just being oneself; the political nature of just being in one's skin each day.

Chapter 4: The Church

"Da da da da da ooh da da ooh da da da" is something akin to the rhythm the dancers tap out with their feet moving in and out of face to face pairings, a square, and then finally a circle. The dancers shout "free, free, free." A reach to the heavens and then a sudden fall to the floor and roll. Almost as quickly as the dancers move down and into the floor they are up and out of it. In a diagonal line across the back of the stage each dancer sways in her own way, arms floating, torso too. The dancers, each on her own timing, fall out of this trancelike swaying. Each one exits the trance with a barely audible gasp, like breath caught in the throat and an arresting motion in stark contrast to the swaying. Each dancer then moves between the swaying and the caught moment, interrupted only by the sound of a politician's declaration. The mood shifts.

Discovering the Speaking, Preaching, Singing Body
Moving in the Church, Marching in the Streets: Struggle for Liberation in Living & Loving

Upon embarking on this journey of investigating the relationship between the movement of the church and that of the streets, I carried with me three basic assumptions. First, I assumed that the 21st century church had not only the ability, but also the responsibility to operate much in the manner of the church of the 1960s during the Civil Rights era. Second, I assumed that the Black Lives Matter Movement recognized the 21st century church as a partner in the struggle for black liberation and justice. Finally, I assumed that the 21st century church could function as a site of joy with something to offer the Black Lives Matter Movement in place of what too often looked like diffused anger. I would like to say that at least one of my assumptions was correct, but that is not the case. Having served as an adjunct pastor for nearly seven years in a church that many would recognize as one committed to social justice I assumed that the relationship we had with the Black Lives Matter chapter in our community was replicated in churches and chapters across the country. I was wrong. I was wrong not only about the extent to which our

model was replicated, but also regarding the efficacy of our model. Upon further investigation it became clear that the relationship between the church and the modern movement is tenuous at best. The Black Church is no longer the space where the movement is built and evolves. There are churches involved; however, they operate more like visitors, rather than initiators or partners; a far cry from the presence of their 1960s predecessors. I also discovered that the Black Lives Matter Movement, in its composition of a large number of millennials, many representing various faiths traditions, was not looking to the Christian Black Church for support in the same way of its predecessor, the Civil Rights Movement. And finally, I discovered that my definition of joy was perhaps too linear, not taking into account the multiple possibilities of joy.

In "Overcoming Racial Faith," former dean of the Duke University Divinity School, Dr. Willie Jennings, addresses the complex relationship between the church and race, noting that there is a racial architecture built inside of Christian life and practice in the West. He goes on to discuss at length the ways in which the church has been complicit in and at times a progenitor of racism. "Racial faith grew on the ground of early European colonialism" (Jennings 2015, 7). It is the church that led to the dissolution of identity rooted in time and space replacing it with race as an all-encompassing construct of identity that would forever alter the world (Jennings 2105, 7). Ironically, this Christian faith is heralded as a cornerstone of the Civil Rights movement as presented in Eboni Marshall Thurman's article, "She Who the Son sets Free: Black Womanist Resistance in Context." According to Thurman, also at Duke Divinity School, "black women's faith in God (…) has historically shaped their action in the world" (Thurman 2015, 11). Drawing

attention to the contributions of women like Jarena Lee, a preacher, and Ana Julia Cooper, an educator and ordained minister, Thurman points to the marriage between faith in God and activity to combat injustice, as the cornerstone of black womanism. For Thurman, the church and the movement are not only in conversation, but partners in the struggle for liberation. However, as the focus of her article shifts to the present-day contributions of black women to the civil rights struggle continuing in the 21st century, mention of the church and faith gradually disappear. Nevertheless, she continues to frame the Black Lives Matter Movement as a black womanist theological endeavor. Holding both Jennings and Thurman in conversation points to the complexity of the church movement relationship then and now.

Nostalgic notions of church as site of singing and praying and clapping and rousing speeches by young preachers leading the charge for the attainment of equal rights for Black bodies may be just that, notions. Atlantic staff writer, Emma Green, who covers politics, policy and religion, points out in her piece, "Black Activism, Unchurched," that there have been charges of exploitation leveled against pastors using the (Black Lives Matter) movement for personal gain (Green 2016). She notes that the church and the movement seem to be at odds for a number of reasons including, but not limited to opposing views on sexual orientation, the practice of prosperity gospel, church scandal, and lack of church relevance for this generation.

The relationship between the movement and church is a complicated one, fraught with disparate goals, divergent foundational truths and perhaps even different tactics for the attainment of liberation. The Black Church is not simply a site of joy, the Black Lives

Matter Movement, one of anger. The truth is, the Black Church is for many a site of great joy and sorrow, of dualities, that sometimes make it a painful and confusing place for the very lives that we scream matter. And yet there is something in the gathering of bodies once a week if only for an hour; the gathering of like bodies, tired bodies, bodies beat down by the well constructed operating systems of oppression that silence and muzzle the voices, diminish the spirits of those bodies; there is something to their gathering together to sing, to pray, to dance, to listen, to ponder, to envision liberation if only for one day, one hour.

The gathering of bodies in worship is a sort of choreography supported by technique, a way of doing. Bodies sit. They kneel. They stand. And all of this in careful coordination with music and words. Call and response: Let the church say, "Amen." Audience engagement: Turn to your neighbor and say "Neighbor…". The ministers process into the space. Perhaps candles are lit. The technique of worship is a complex one, with much doing. The worship, or work of the people, is highly structured and codified. This moving of bodies in prescribed ways has the power to be a site of both joy and defiance, although it does not always function that way. When the church, which translates as "body" in Greek, is indeed a space of full acceptance of complicated humanity, our very flesh and blood, then it is a place of joy *and* defiance, especially when so many other spaces demand that Black people bring only fragments of themselves to the party.

In looking not only at the Black Lives Matter Movement, but more broadly at what one can call the technique of protest, it is evident that there too is the potential for joy and defiance. The protest march, a collection of bodies in particular space, performs a

sort of choreography; bodies moving in time along a prescribed route to a sound-score of their own making. Bodies scatter at the sound of gunfire, the sensation of tear gas. Bodies shifting and shoving, in close proximity. Bodies walk, at times in canon, as those in front relay messages to those behind. Bodies run, as necessary, to a new performance site for a captive audience or away from impending danger. The organizers or choreographers do the work beforehand of securing permits and communicating with law enforcement. The technique of protest is a complex one; one that has been handed down; the modern performance re-interpreted, re-envisioned.

So what? People move in the streets when they march and they move in the church when they worship. In both instances, I daresay that the people performing use their bodies, knowingly or not, to create sites of individual agency. They are not just moving without order, or purpose as the uninformed observer might assume. Kneeling bodies, marching bodies, carry with them the stories of those that knelt and marched before. They provide the opportunity for pondering: What are these bodies doing? What do these bodies signify? What do they tell us about the operation of race, gender, sexual orientation, class in our society? What bodies are present? absent? Which bodies get to move freely? Which bodies are bound even as they appear free?

Black bodies have historically been viewed as "other" through the Euro-centric lens, often falling into one of the following categories: threatening, desirous, or awe-inspiring. As Brenda Dixon-Gottschild notes in *Digging: The Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*, the black dancing body is "the screen upon which Europeans projected their fears and phobias along with their fantasies and

desires" (2002, 76). Just think of Sarah Baartman and a century later, Josephine Baker. Or think of the strange fruit that Billie Holiday and later Nina Simone sung of. Think of Trayvon Martin, whose untimely death and the acquittal of his killer, sparked the Black Lives Matter Movement. The church has the potential to be a site of joy, but also a site of safety. There in the sanctuary, behind the pulpit, in the pews, the black body, dancing or still, takes on a different hue. There the black body is a safe body, a civilized body, a sanitized and less threatening body.

In a 2013 study conducted on lynching, religion and morality, sociologists Amy Kate Bailey and Karen A. Snedker conclude that "religion frequently reinforces moral order and is a key factor in social control" (2011, 854). In fact, the height of religious fervor in this country during the early part of the 20th century, coincided with what was later referred to as the "lynching era" marked by roughly one lynching per week in the American South. So while the mere existence of religion, of church, did not result in a national safe space for black Americans, there is evidence to suggest that the churched black body was for White America, a safe black body, a civilized black body, a sanitized and less threatening black body. In the middle part of the 20th century with the emergence of the non-violent movement led by religious leader and preacher Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., there was certainly a sense that the churched, non-violent, God-fearing black body was far less of a threat than say that of the gun toting bodies of Huey P. Newton and other members of the Black Panther Party.

"In the 1960s, activists confronted white mobs and police with dignity and decorum, sometimes dressing in church clothes and kneeling in prayer during protests to make

a clear distinction between who was evil and who was good" says Barbara Reynolds, an ordained minister and author of the first unauthorized biography of Jesse Jackson (2015, par. 3). She goes on to say, "The 1960s movement also had an innate respectability because our leaders often were heads of the black church, as well" (2015, par.3).

The church has long since been for black Americans a signifier of decorum and respectability. It has functioned like a badge, "Look, I am a good church going black person. I dress nicely and speak well. I should not be harmed." This puts into context the way that violence against black people is often reported in the 21st century. I can still see the graduation picture of Michael Brown in his green cap and gown. He should not have been mercilessly gunned down in the street. After all, he was a high school graduate planning on going to college. But what if he had dropped out? Had no green cap and gown to don? Would his death have been any less senseless? Merciless? The worth of his body became entangled with how his body moved through space. The cap and gown were signifiers that his body moved through space perhaps with a heightened level of respect, of knowledge, of decorum; therefore, imbuing his body with greater worth.

The movement of black bodies in the church and on the streets might have been inextricably linked during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s; however, today, not so much. The Black Lives Matter protests of the 21st century with edgy slogans, direct confrontation of the police, no church clothes, no white gloves and no kneeling are in many ways at odds with the respectable, safe, certainly less confrontational practice of the protest dance of King's day. Perhaps "the current generation of young black activists

is calling for a network of black institutions built outside the context of the strongest black institution there is: the church" (Green 2016).

If the infusion of joy into the Black Lives Matter movement and more broadly the struggle to truly liberate black bodies in America is not to be found in the black church, then where? In a 2015 speech in St. Louis, Missouri as part of The Truth Telling Project, Dr. Angela Davis had this to say: "My primary reason for being here (…) Ferguson activists, is to thank you because you refused to drop the torch of struggle. When you were urged to go home and go back to business as usual, you said no and in the process you made Ferguson a worldwide symbol of resistance" (Davis 2016, 83). In reading this and more accounts of protest marches in response to the wave of violence against black bodies in the United States, I began to ask myself, "what is black joy?" If indeed black people are a diasporic people, having been forcibly taken from their homelands and dispersed throughout the world, living in spaces where they are systematically targeted by the structures of power then, perhaps their joy can be born out of resistance, out of struggle. This is not to shrink or diminish the breadth and width of joy possible and available to black people, but only to reconsider it. "They tried to bury us, but they didn't know we were seeds" (1995). These words from the poet Dinos Christianopoulos, sidelined by the Greek literary community in the 1970s because he was gay, give expression to the kind of joy that is not to be confused with mere circumstantial happiness. Becoming a tree when you were thought to be trash…now that's joy. There is joy in visibility, in compelling the world to watch, to wonder, to act. When the dance of protest moves from the confines of the church walls, the paved streets and spills over into our everyday lives, then perhaps,

there is where we will find joy "bonded together through a beautiful struggle that is restorative, not depleting" (Black Lives Matter, "Mission Statement"). Neither the Black Church nor the Black Lives Matter Movement are perfect; both are fraught with contradictions, with the vestiges of colonialist paradigms; however, perhaps they both provide the skeleton of a model for the attainment of black joy and the practice of defiance. As a good friend of mine used to say, "In life, you have to learn how to eat the meat and spit out the bones." It is up to us to mine the deep treasury of collective practice available to us in the Black Church and the nature of protest from the Civil Rights era of the 60s to the Black Lives Matter Movement of the 21st century to discover our own tools of joy and defiance.

In looking at the relationship between the Black Lives Matter Movement and what is broadly termed the Black Church, I located the speaking, preaching, singing body. Text made its way into ***Black Madonna and Miss America*** *by necessity as an illustration of the significance of storytelling; the significance of having a voice. The joy inherent in the speaking, preaching, singing body made its way into the work in a very organic manner. In the rehearsal process I made space for voice. As a result, the very personal stories of each dancer became central to the making of the work. Minus the song and text, the work is something else entirely, somewhat less specific and intentionally located in time and space.*

In both the church and the movement there is a certain space held for voice. There is singing and shouting in both contexts, storytelling too. Although I did not deliberately set out to make the work about the church or the movement, there are vestiges of each.

There is story in the singing. There is a call and response nature to the text that the viewers are invited to listen in on, shared too among the dancers.

Conclusion

I offer the following paper as a glimpse into the world that sustained and fed me in the process of making *Black Madonna and Miss America*. The embodied research I conducted on the dance floors of underground house music events informed my approach to work in the studio, the performance of the work on stage and the way that I related to my dancers offstage. In my studio rehearsal practice I facilitated the affirmation of black centered, de-colonized space that allowed the dancers to move freely. That de-colonized space was sister circle and prayer meeting, dance floor and school room; fluid space, shifting as necessary. This paper was presented at the Collegium of African Diaspora Dance Conference on February 23, 2020. Since then, Samuel Andre Burns, aka Sam the Man Burns died suddenly on March 7, 2020. He is survived by many who loved and adored him, but most significantly, his former spouse, Rita Jean Kelly Burns and their son, Mason Burns.

Reconfiguring Notions of Home: Underground House Dancing as De-Colonized Space of Resistance

> SING: When I think of home I think of place where there's love overflowing I wish I was home; I wish I was back there with the things I've been knowing (Smalls 1989, 3).

On February 19, 2020 the District of Columbia Designation Act was passed. The act officially designates go go music the official music of the District of Columbia. This comes on the heels of the don't mute DC movement; a movement centered around the preservation of the cultural capital of the nation's capital; a movement in response to the

changing demographics of the city; a movement led and galvanized by black DC natives and their allies. So it is fitting that we are looking closely at the way social dance; namely black social dance, factors in the being and living and thriving of black bodies under attack.

Throughout this talk, I will refer to black bodies inhabiting space outside of the white gaze, for instance. Why black? Why white? I speak in these terms as a reflection of the spectrum that has been presented for us here in these divided states of America; not unique to us, but arguably most acute, this sense of white on one end and black on the other with whiteness as the goal of the American Dream. So when I say black and white, I am not leaving out Asian, LatinX, and other racial categories, but instead acknowledging that the society in which we find ourselves is built on the attainment of humanity through whiteness such that one's proximity to whiteness or blackness determines how one is able to move.

Home…

Community	Love	Salvation	Freedom	Flow
Life	Spiritual	Church	Soul	Belonging

Just some of the words and phrases that come up in conversation with househeads (devoted followers of house) about house music. It's tricky, pinpointing what this thing called house is really all about. It's essence is difficult to articulate. It is something that must be experienced. It cannot be fully understood within the confines of words and theoretical inquiry. And yet, that has not stopped me from trying.

House music, house dance and the culture, the ways of being that characterize it, are in flux and constantly evolving. The freedom of the form facilities the incorporation of not only a myriad of musical genres such as jazz, funk, soul, salsa, Chicago jazz and blues, but also a myriad of people; a spectrum of different ages, races, and socio-economic backgrounds. House is transitional and pan-African; it creates space and yet is not bound by it.

House is short for the Warehouse, a Chicago club conceptualized, owned and operated by a Black gay man. His name was Robert Williams. But it was Frankie Knuckles, the resident DJ at the Warehouse, who would later become known as the Godfather of House. Frankie began adding pre-programmed drum tracks to the disco he spun-at four on the floor (Hall 2020). (DEMONSTRATE) He didn't stop there though. He also began incorporating other sounds into his tracks like old Philly classics and R&B hits. There was no discrimination in the music and sounds he mixed into his sets. In a given night you could hear the Beatles, then Diana Ross, then an obscure rock band, all without missing a beat; four on the floor (Hall 2020).

The warehouse had three levels and was a private gay club. It opened at 12am and closed at 8am. Before the Warehouse or House, as it was later dubbed, club spaces in Chicago, were notoriously racially segregated (Hall 2020). The House changed that. The House became a place where identity was fluid and malleable; where people could define and re-imagine themselves beyond their zip code, skin color, pay check or other social identity markers. The House grew out of a need for the queer community to take up space freely and safely. Unemployment, racism, the influx of drugs and guns into black and

brown communities; these were just some of the social issues of the mid 60s and 70s that made the ground fertile for imagining something different; fertile for building a new kind of house.

While the genre originated in Chicago, my practical and theoretical research has been situated in Washington DC, New York, and New Jersey. In these cities the people are almost always black or black adjacent. By black adjacent, I mean, connected to blackness through marriage, mimicry, ally-ship, or social proximity. In these spaces, there are no gay house events and straight house events; only space where black and same gender loving and sis and lesbian rock their bodies (Nod to house music anthem, Jefferson Marshall's "Rock Your Body").

Over a period of four years now, I have attended house music and dance events primarily in need of my own spiritual healing. Only as a secondary consideration did I begin to think about how others were experiencing this same space which sparked queries beyond the dance floor. I became interested in the similarities and the differences between what I was experiencing in house music and what I had experienced in Judeo-Christian worship practices. I became especially interested in why it was so much easier for me to experience freedom and community in moving to house music, than it was to experience that same freedom in the Black Church.

The particular denomination I was a part of, The United Church of Christ, is a progressive denomination at the forefront of gay marriage, also at the forefront the abolition of slavery, all of it and yet even with by-laws dripping in language about freedom and justice, there was something missing. Around the same time I was thinking about this

irony, there was a lot of discussion about the concept of de-colonization. We needed to decolonize our minds, our bodies; that was the answer to ending white supremacy or what I prefer to call, white destruction. I found it difficult to de-colonize my mind, especially as I traversed white-centric spaces with white values and codes of conduct. Mind you, even though there were black bodies in the Black Church, the foundations, the structures of that body were rooted in whiteness. I was part of one of the most progressive denominations in the world and yet freedom seemed so far out of reach. It was around this time that I started seeking freedom elsewhere. I had always loved to dance at the club, but had become increasingly frustrated when I would go out and people would stand around, wasting perfectly good music…Then I discovered house.

The 18th Street Lounge, the Capital House Music Festival and Chosen Production events at Zeba Bar all in Washington, DC, Soul in the Horn in Brooklyn and sometimes Chelsea, the Rosedale House Festival of New Jersey: these have all been regular sites of investigation. I have spent many a weekend or week night under outdoor tents, in club venues, on grassy hills, and restaurant floors experiencing this thing called "house". There was something particular about this brand of clubbing. There was no standing around in six-inch heels, with drink in hand, nodding approvingly at the DJ while making small talk and moving just enough to demonstrate sex appeal, but not work up a sweat. There was no slipping through the crowd to steal a hand around the waist or brush of the breast. None of that. Aside from a few people standing around, usually only to catch their breath, people were really gettin' it in: dancing and dripping with sweat, hair askew, a towel strewn over the shoulder and makeup running, comfortable shoes for sure and

wearing anything from a track suit to a tutu with cowboy boots and cowrie shells. These were my people. I wondered where they had been all along and why it had taken so long for us to find each other. Almost immediately, I recognized in my body, a freedom in the discovery of alternative space. It was only later, in beginning to process this bodily experience more holistically that it occurred to me why this space, this experience, this thing called "house" was so special. The embodied experience of house music and dance culture is potentially the closest thing to a de-colonized space black bodies will ever experience while still inhabiting this planet. A sweeping claim, I know, but stay with me.

New Shapes

First, bodies in the house literally take on new shapes; shapes that are not pre-determined or codified. In the competitive house scene there are intricate footwork patterns commonly performed, but the only technique essential to the house dancer is what is commonly referred to as the jack. The jack is the forward and backward movement of the chest and the pelvis in time with the music. That's it. That is the foundational movement. From there, bodies can add virtually anything, even arrest the jack all together and explore further as long as they come back to it; like a home base of sorts. Bodies can twist and turn, pulsate, bend and fold in unconventional ways. How is this different from other social dance or club settings? Freedom to take on new shape is unique to house in that the music itself is always evolving. Freedom is embedded in the sound. Remember, house, with the kick drum, 4 on the floor and the booming bass, absorbs other sounds and in doing so becomes new again and again. Fela, Luther Vandross, Celia Cruz, Paul McCartney, Stevie Wonder, Fleetwood Mac; all fair game in a house set. So too with movement; as in

other African Diaspora forms, mimicry and call and response are ever present, but ultimately the unique essence and style of the particular moving body is what house makes room for.

PLAY COMPETITION CLIP-TASHA AND NADEEYA (Van Emden 2019).

As you can see, house is elusive. The dancers decontextualize and deconstruct movement- always with new possibilities looming. The free flow of it makes it difficult to commodify; makes it difficult for white destruction to consume.

Continuing with this idea of new shapes…and new ways of being.. this idea of possibility…

In her work *Babylon Girls*, Jayna Brown describes what she calls the politics of costuming which is the ability of Black bodies, namely Black femme bodies to traverse national and international boundaries, to practice migration and assume social power through dress (2008, 227). At times the dress or costume functions as a disguise and at other times a method of re-making or re-fashioning. In the house, bodies costume or clothe themselves as they see fit. House events are noted for not imposing dress codes. In the house bodies don themselves with whatever accommodates movement and facilitates style, but is never prescribed. I have seen boas and four inch danceable heals in the house; cowboy hats and boots in the house; garters and lingerie in the house; cross dressing in the house; jumpsuits and track suits, in the house. This politics of costuming in the house makes room…

While still a pastor at a United Church of Christ congregation in Washington DC I would often spend Sunday nights on the dance floor at Eighteenth St. Lounge. Sam the

Man Burns in the back room. Pure joy. House Music all night long. Last record spin at 3am. On one night, or morning, in particular, depending on how you look at it, I ran into one of my parishioners. And for a fleeting moment the threat of return to the world as it is, loomed between us, but was just as quickly swallowed up by the bass, the cowbell, the four on the floor, that set our bodies back to twisting and turning, pulsating, bending and folding into new shapes; new ways of being.

There is an arresting of titles and degrees on the dance floor of the house. The house creates opportunity for re-making and re-envisioning. The promoters, the djs and the househeads that keep re-turning participate in the construction of the world as they would have it be, setting aside, if only for a few hours, the world that is. They fashion or make their own homes. When I think of home, I think of a place where there's love over-flowing…

In addition to the elusive, shape shifting nature of house, it also functions as a respite from the after shock of colonization because it inhabits space that transcends the white gaze. Fred Moten says "Black life is not lived in the world that the world lives in, but is lived underground, in outer space" (2011, 28). House Music and Dance Culture is that underground outer space place for the black body, for the black queer body, for the black differently abled body, for the bodied, the ancestors's wildest dreams.

In *Scenes of Subjection* Sadiya Hartman illustrates how during slavery domination was challenged in the practice of pleasure despite its ambivalence (1997). She notes that though pleasure was fleeting and carried great consequences if discovered, the enslaved sought it out, anyway, as a kind of redress (1997, 50). Househeads are devotees. They

follow DJs around the country and even the world. They attend week long festivals. They blast house music on the job. They revel in the culture, the music that carries them through the work week, through a difficult time in their lives. House is beyond the white gaze and therefore a legitimate site not only of black pleasure, but of black resistance; resistance not in the sense of arming a militia for the revolution. No. Embodied resistance that counters the story crafted for black bodies by the white world that masquerades as the human standard. Embodied resistance that counters narratives of black body as deviant, as other, as crooked and replaces those narratives with black body as good, whole, enlivened, responsive, vulnerable.

Hartman goes on to describe the ambivalence of pleasure, stating that the pleasure experienced by slaves often also pleased their masters (1997, 50). House creates space for pleasure that does not exist within the confines of white destruction. For all the love and acceptance that is house, it is rather insular and therefore escapes the white gaze. Those who know where to go, just know and the more you go to house events, the more you just keep seeing the same faces over and over again. The dancers and the djs are underground and outer space, momentarily sheltered from the white gaze.

Like many black dance forms, house continues to resist being morphed into a commodity. The form grew out of the need to create space where movement could exist without boundaries, without categorization and codification; where movement could exist in a liminal state of constant flux and re-invention, absorbing the happenings in the re-created and re-envisioned space that is now.

The experience on the dance floor is not to be reduced to "frolic and fun" or even escapism. No, the experience on the dance floor is a necessary working out on and through the body in relation to other bodies and the drum. In the words of DJ Nicky Siano, resident DJ at Studio 54 "The movement on the dance floor is a release for people. And that release is so primarily important that people will take it in many different forms" (Sumner 2018).

If blackness is indeed inscribed on the body through the horrors of slavery, as Sadiya Hartman and others have argued, then it follows that healing, transcendence, any avenue to freedom must also take place in the body. The working out of the body in getting back home; finding or discovering or making shelter; (sometimes with the anonymity of darkness as an accomplice, but always with the shelter of the drum).

Community Love Salvation Freedom Belonging

Life Spiritual Church Soul

It is fitting that a genre of dance music dubbed house is described using these words… Because for many of us house as we envision it has nothing to do with a mother and a father, a dog and a white picket fence, but instead it has everything to do with safety, shelter, healing, comfort, and tribe.

> IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS JACK, AND JACK HAD A GROOVE, And from this groove came the groove of all grooves, And while one day viciously throwing down on his box, Jack boldly declared, "Let there be HOUSE"
> (Mr. Fingers, 1998).

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