
Senior Projects Spring 2019

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

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Near Never

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Bard College

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Near Never

Senior Project Submitted to

The Division of Arts

of Bard College

by

Jaleel Roy Green

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2019

I would like to first give thanks to God. Without God I would not be where I am today. I give him all the praise, honor and glory.

To my mom and dad:

It is because of you that I am who I am. Your constant love and support is what has allowed me to live my dreams everyday.

To Keva:

My right hand gal. I don't know what these four years would have been without you. Your love and support mean the absolute world to me and is what keeps me going everyday. You have changed my life forever. You will always have a special place in my heart Ms. Chang. I will never forget the moments that we have shared and how you allowed me to be my most true and authentic self.

To Roobi:

Ever since the first day I met you in the gym I knew there was something special about you. Your light shines so bright. I will never forget all the laughter and smiles. I will never forget the beautiful moments we have shared in the studio and on stage. I look up to you. You make me want to be a better me, and for that I am eternally grateful.

To Payton, Janine, Raif, and the *Near Never* cast:

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. You all have made my dreams come true. This piece meant so much to me. Thank you for all of your time and energy you put in the piece. You all changed the lives of the people that watched the show and you most definitely changed mine.

Sakinah

You are a force. I can't wait to see how you evolve. I feel like you are my little sister. You're family. Whatever you need I got you by any means necessary.

Eniyah

The Queen herself. Thank you for being someone that I could go to for anything. Thank you for being someone I could confide in. The greatest plant based black girl on the planet. You deserve the world.

Hunter

I am so happy that you were able to be a part of one of the biggest moments of my life so far. You've always been there for me when I needed you even when I thought you weren't there.

Thank you for all your help with making *Near Never* happen. I felt your love and your passion every step of the way. I am so grateful to have you in my life.

Antonio

Baby! The way you make me smile, makes me smile. When I see your face I light up and I could honestly not have asked for a better friend. I can't wait to see what the future hold for you. You are a king!

Bard Posse 4

Payton, Matthew, Saul, Marketa, Zien, Ashley, Azlan, Jazlyn, Jada, Kristin. I love each and every one of you. Thank you for having my back. Thank you for always pushing me and holding me accountable. You believe in me and that makes me want to work harder.

To my advisor, Jean Wagner:

You have always saw the greatness in the inside of me. There was never once where you doubted me. You made me feel like a true artist and made me feel capable. You gave me the words when I didn't have any. Since L&T you have stayed on my side. I feel so lucky to have you.

Before I begin, I would like to take a second to acknowledge all the black lives that have been taken in acts of police brutality. This is not a full list, but rather cases that have touched my life. I invite you to take a pause after reading each name. Alton Sterling. Tamir Rice. Michael Brown. Eric Garner. Philando Castile. Trayvon Martin. Growing up, I didn't completely understand what it meant to be a black man in America. I was sheltered from the world by my parents. They covered my eyes so I didn't see the gruesome nature of the world we live in, but also made it clear to me that I was unique and special. The only thing was my parents, no matter how hard they tried, couldn't shelter me from everything. The world would find a way to make itself known to me in ways that I would never forget.

When first cultivating this piece I had no idea what I would do. I knew that I wanted to make work that meant something to me and that would mean something to others. Being an artist from New Orleans, I am always thinking of ways to give my city a piece of hope. I realized this when I was about twelve and Hurricane Katrina occurred. My dad came to my siblings and I and told us to pack four of everything. He thought that much like other hurricanes we wouldn't be gone for that long. As we packed we could hear the overwhelming noise of the news in the background. It seemed that my parents never wanted to miss what was going on in case we had to abruptly change plans. We packed up our car and we headed to Plano, Texas. Once we made it to Texas I was excited because in my young mind this was a vacation. It meant time away from school and a chance to explore a new place. Little did I know, this trip would be the most devastating trip I could have ever imagined. I will never forget getting to the place we were staying and how my parents immediately turned on the news. I would never be able to forget the images that popped up on that television. The devastation that had been happening in my home

while I was not there. I remember feeling so hopeless as I watched the tv in that hotel room. You never think these thing will happen to you until they do.

My experience as a young black man from New Orleans is what drove my Theater and Performance Senior Project piece. I decided to start with what I know and see where that would take me. A couple things sparked my passion for making a piece about police brutality. It started when I was in New Orleans and I was having a conversation with my mother. We would talk about how we love the television show *Black-ish*. This show was a source of inspiration for my piece. I was inspired by the way the television series talks about real issues in the black community in a comedic way that aims to educate its viewers. I wanted to take this model of a black sitcom and find a way to present it on the stage. I wanted it to do just what *Blackish* has done. When writing the script I knew that I would have my work cut out for me. My mother spoke about how there is a general narrative of what the household of a black family is supposed to look like, which is always the same. Most of the narratives includes the young black boy who plays sports, is raised by a single mother, whose father is in prison, who eventually turns to drugs. One day I was sitting in my room and received an alert on my phone about a black man killed by law enforcement. I started reading through the story but after a while couldn't look at it anymore. I sat in my bed and cried. I didn't know what to feel. I got up and ran to my advisor, Jean Wagner, and immediately ranted, telling her that I needed to change my idea for my senior project. She worked with me to find this new idea I had and helped make it a reality for me. From that moment, I realized the importance of media and news in my own life. I realized that as much as we try to stay away from media, it inescapably surrounds us. This is the feeling I wanted

the show to have. The mother is always watching the news at home. She doesn't want her son to end up like the boys in the stories she sees on the news.

The soundscape also reflects the media with some sounds being directly from media sources. The media that the mother pays close attention to, becomes a reality for her when her son dies. He becomes a part of the media; something the mother never wanted. This show was about the mother making a decision to self heal and seek community. At the end of the show, we see that the state has given the mother everything that her son had on the night that he died. We see her pulling the items out of the box and remembering her son through the smell of the hoodie. As we do not see what is inside of the box, when the mother opens the box representing a substantially moving moment. She realizes that what has happened to her son is bigger than herself and that if she wants justice for her son and the many other victims then she has to step up to the plate and fight for it. The mother, in many ways, finds her purpose in this moment. She goes from sitting in the house watching the news all the time to being the hero of her story and using her power to save other black lives in her community. She becomes an activist.

Although I didn't know how I would create the world, I knew what I wanted the piece to touch on. It started with the idea of the black mother. I looked deep into the stories of many black men who have had their lives taken by police brutality. Something that I had noticed was how the mother always speaks out and always makes a statement on the news about the corruption and prejudices of our criminal justice system. The mother character began to form ideas about the the significance of these prejudices. I also wanted to look into what the black mother represents in the black community as well as pull from my own experience with my own mother. I also felt that Trayvon Martin's mother deeply inspired the mother character in a

profound way. Her journey had a powerful impact on this work. For example, she inspired some of the physicality for the character.

Furthermore, I looked into black mothers and found videos of their children who had died from acts of police brutality. I thought this was an incredibly powerful moment that sparked my interest in exploring the trajectory of these mothers. I quickly noticed how they go from having their children in their lives, to grieving, to becoming activist in their communities. And that this journey was not a linear one by any means. It was moving to see how all of them are now doing work in their communities. It feels as though they did not have a choice. Thus, I was motivated to see how moments like these could look theatrically.

I was also motivated to think about how the black mother will be played theatrically. Through the writing process, I began to think about relationships the important to the mother. I became very engaged with the relationship between the mother and the son. I explored through writing the story her interactions with him. I began to see that the two of them had a very playful relationship, but when the mom meant business, she really meant business.

Troy, her only son, finds himself constantly thinking about his own relationships. I wanted Troy to have many connections to many different people in the show as there was something that Troy can gain from everyone that he is connected to. Whether that was being with Rocky, or his teacher Mr.P being his mentor and helping him on his path to getting into college.

However, his circumstance, in terms of being a black boy in America is his downfall. This idea is really striking to me, because it is the very way that black men are looked at which is why they cannot succeed. When writing Troy into the script I closely used the story of Trayvon

Martin because his death, while not the first case, was one that sparked an uproar in the black community. It was the moment that the black community decided that enough was enough. This is where I remember as a kid the symbol of the black hoodie became super prevalent. The image of the black hoodie is something that I wanted to focus on in the show which is why we see Troy wearing it throughout the show. It was really important to me that the script was very simplistic. The writing was made specifically that there are things that only black people would be able to understand based on the way that they were raised or the way the black household is ran. Much like the black sitcoms, it was important to me that other black people saw themselves represented on the stage and had moments that they were able to connect to. Moments that would make them laugh, cry, and cringe. The show's aim was to take the audience on an emotional rollercoaster ride. The goal was to constantly give the audience the opportunity to tie knots, but not tie them too tight. Constantly being in a state of curiosity, constantly wondering what something could possibly be. The show is able to affect the audience by making them fall in love with the individual characters and how they relate to one another.

All the characters point to Troy. They are all related to Troy in some way. All parts of the equation must be in tact in order for everything to work out in Troy's favor. It was important to me that the audience fall in love with Troy. It is very easy to get caught up in his character because his character is very charming, and in many ways we want the best for him. We want him to get what he wants.

It was important to me that Troy was not the stereotype of the black thug that gets killed by the police. If you look at many of these cases, it is more likely that the victims are the complete opposite of this stereotype. It was just something designed by white people to give

black people a reason to be profiled and targeted. Trayvon Martin was not a thug, he was just a young boy walking home. Tamir Rice was not a thug, he was just a kid that was playing in the park. I wanted Troy's character to be kind of shy, witty, and a little nerdy. Someone that we could relate to. When we look at him we see someone who we can feel connected to and not judge based on what he looks like. I wanted to completely change the narrative of what the audience may have been expecting to see.

Through the process, I played an interesting role as both the playwright as well as the choreographer. I had never had to take on both these roles simultaneously before. When writing I found myself trying to find ways to choreograph through the writing process. I was curious to see what would manifest through the writing by thinking this way. I found things brewing in moments such as the court scene where we see that it is repeated multiple times. This was used as a way to demonstrate the journey that the mother had to go through with the court case becoming bigger than she had ever thought. This was important for me to show because Trayvon Martin's mother talked about a story where she had received all of her son's belongings back from the state and was asked if a museum could take the items and display them. She quickly denied their request. She didn't want her son to be on display. She felt that her son's belongings belonged to her and she needed it to grieve. She soon realized that this was all bigger than her. Millions of people were fighting for her son along side of her. In that moment she said that she also realized that Trayvon had many brothers and sisters in the world. He had many mothers and fathers out there. Needless to say, the court case goes to the supreme court and has to go through a long process of questioning and trials. It starts to wear at the skin a little by the time we hear it the third time in the piece. By using repetition in this moment I wanted to put the audience in the

mother's shoes. They have to go on the long journey with her. They have to go through what she has to go through in that moment. This is also a statement about our criminal justice system that they are literally trying to get you to say the wrong things so that they can use it against you. One small slip up and it can mean that you don't get the justice that you long for. The court scene is also one of the only moments that we see the dancers not behind the scrim. This is significant because the dancers become lawyers in this moment. They become the system. In the choreography we see gestural movement that hint at the day to day for someone working in a court. At the end of this section we see the state giving the mother back all of Troy's belongings that he had the night that he died.

A big part of my choreography is repetition and I wanted to find a way to parallel these two things. In the making of the work I really struggled with my identity as a maker. When starting this project I was told by a professor, "Just to be clear, I want to make sure you know that this is not a dance concert." When this was said to me I immediately retreated into my artist shell and didn't know how I would express myself as a maker. Dancing has been a huge part of how I make theater and vice versa. Theater and dance are interconnected art forms that work together. This was what I learned in my time at Bard College, at least. I remember sitting in Miriam Felton-Dansky's Intro to Theater and Performance: Time and Space course. This was where I first learned what dance theater was. Before the class I didn't know that the genre existed. She showed us the work of Pina Bausch who is a dance theater artist. She showed us the piece *Rite of Spring*. I was so motivated once I saw this piece in class. I told myself that Dance theater was what I was meant to do. It was the way that she used the dancers as an ensemble to aid in telling the story. It was the way the dancers danced with the red cloth which inspired me to

use the rope in my piece. The rope symbolized bondage and traces back further than police brutality. It touches on times of slavery and how we are living in a different time period, but the bondage has just presents itself differently. The rope is a reminder of our history. This motif is projected throughout different moments in the other parts of the choreography.

I was interested in the overall aspect of the ensemble. How the dancers are able to connect with one another, while still teaching the audience what they need to know. The dancers were used to foreshadow the events to come and also to tell us a little more about what the audience just watched. They were also there as a representation of the emotive state of the characters in different moments. The dancers in this piece acted as a chorus. A chorus that narrated the plot of the show. As a maker I am very much so interested in exploring how to really capture an audience through the choreography. Where there are moments where I am giving the audience what they need and when there are moments when I am not. I am excited to continue to explore new movement vocabulary that I can use in my practice as a choreographer.

I am also interested to continue to see how choreography can coexist with other forms and see what that can do to the performance. I am interested in finding the intricacies and specificity of movement. To become more of a risk taker as a maker of dance theater so that I can make the audience think and feel. Take them on that roller coaster ride. As a dance theater artist I am interested in my journey and how I can take the the moments, and life experiences and transform them in a way that will touch others. I want to make work that people can see a part of themselves in. work that people can latch onto something when they watch the work. Work that when people get up and walk out the theater it is still in their hearts, minds, and souls.

When first starting the piece I was thinking of elements that I could use in the show. I was thinking of what could aid the story on top of a really simple script. I got to a place where I was thinking of ways that I could make this piece more abstract. The simplicity of the piece scared me. I didn't want to just give the audience the work and not make them work for it. I was in my Design Studio class and saw Nichole Canuso's *Takes*. I was in awe in the way that she used the scrim in her piece. I met with David Szlasa after class and said, "I have to do this." At this point I didn't know the first thing about how these things were possible, but I knew that this was the story I needed to tell. I needed to get across the message that I wanted to convey. It was the way the dancers interacted with the scrim and what was playing on it. Canuso used live cameras inside the scrim where the dancers were aware of where the cameras were. They could record a movement and the movement would appear large on the scrim in black and white. Through working on the piece I realized that this idea would not work for the piece. This is when I figured out that I wanted projections in the show and that I would need to find a way to incorporate this. The projections played a larger role in the storytelling than I could have ever possibly imagined. The projections worked similarly to the way that the dances worked. They gave another layer for the audience to become more curious with the events that were taking place and to deepen the understanding of what the piece was inhabiting. The role of the projections was to put you into the world of the piece. Janine Rogers did an incredible job with bringing the world of the projections to life. To make you feel like you were living what you were watching. The projections were also designed to add to the emotional state of the viewer. It was meant for the audience to feel anxiety or feel uneasy in certain moments. Moments that were most significant for me in the projections was the traveling down a street in New Orleans, and

the images of black men and boys who have been killed by acts of police brutality. The projections in these moments made Troy feel as though he was bleeding into the projections. With the Google Maps projection we had the feeling that he was walking down that street. With the images that pop up, we see them all and then we see Troy on the inside of the scrim. He becomes a part of all of these stories that we are watching. Many of the faces we know the stories so well, but there are also many faces of stories that we may have never heard before. It is sad, but there are so many images and this becomes emotionally overwhelming. Especially because we don't want to see Troy just be another story, or rather another statistic. I was terrified for the scene where Troy is killed by officer fields. I had no idea how I wanted to show the moment. I know I didn't want an inauthentic moment where a fake gun is pointed at Troy and he pretends to die. I just didn't buy it. It wasn't enough for me. That's the incredible part about theater. We were able to take a simple action that we all know and blow it up and make it more conceptual. I wanted to take an unrealistic visualization of a moment which allowed for the moment to be more authentic. The moment needed to be simple so that we could see the bare skeleton of the whole. Using the scrim to project the slowing down of the gun made the bullet appear as if it was shooting off the scrim and hitting Troy. The way the lighting and the projection worked in this moment allowed for this to happen. Alongside the projections the sound score composition done by Dean Sharp gave us another way into the work. The soundscape was compiled of found recordings and sounds. A big part of the sound included moments where we were not able to make out some things that were being said, but the goal was that it made the audience listen closely to try to catch whatever they could. This is making a statement on the filtering of information in 911 calls and what we decide to believe based on

stereotypes. We were also exploring when the music had groove and when the music was more ambient. We were exploring when the audience would bob their head to the music and when they were engulfed in the swallowing nature of the ambiance. Both made us feel in the moment, but represent different physicality and aura on stage. Many of the recordings used were 911 calls from cases of police brutality. For example, we can hear the 911 call made when Trayvon Martin was killed. We can hear the profiling. The recording says, "black male..." You can hear the white woman on the call saying that she didn't want to do anything. She didn't want to go outside. This had me thinking about white fragility. With this piece one thing that I didn't want to do was spoon feed anything to the white members of the audience. If the white members of the audience walked away with one image or moment then the piece would have done its job. I consider myself a pragmatic maker in the sense that I care about what the audience thinks, and I want the audience to leave the theater with something. I want them to take something away from the piece that they can keep with them and remember and pass onto someone else. The white fragility usually manifests in a mechanism of retreat, submission, or passiveness. Either the individual will leave the performance and go home to never think about it or talk about it, just say that it was a good piece and move on, or will never ask questions or have a conversation about the piece because of the fear that they may ask something wrong or offend. A big part of the sound was that we were not able to make out some things that were being said, but the goal was that it made the audience listen closely to try to catch whatever they could. We were also exploring when the music had groove and when the music was more ambient. We were exploring when the audience would bob their head to the music and when they were engulfed in

the swallowing nature of the ambiance. Both made us feel in the moment, but represent different physicality and aura on stage.

I decided to title the show *Near Never*. Besides its alliteration and deep abstractness, the title has a very deep meaning for the show. The idea of *Near Never* points specifically to the character Troy. It has to do with Troy's arc in the show. As audience members we fall in love with Troy's potential in the show. As said before, he is connected to many people and situations in the show. Troy almost gets a lot of things. He almost gets the girl that he really likes, he almost makes his mother proud, he almost gets the mentorship he wants. *Near Never* implies that he gets close to things that he wants, but will never get it. When Troy is gone all the ties are gone. We are then able to see how he has affected many people in his life. This is something he will never know. For example, I decided to place Rocky's dance solo directly after the moment that Troy is killed. I chose to do this because I believe that in this moment dance was able to physically show what the women around Troy are feeling after the moment. The dance that she does in that section is emotive and represents what is happening for her in the moment, but also she represents Troy's mother in this moment as well. She is a representation of femininity. She represents the women in Troy's life. It is interesting that Troy is raised by a single mother. This unfortunately, is the case for many young men in the Black community. The Black mother so often has to be the mother and the father. This relates to the line in my play that the mother says in the show. This is where Troy gets off the phone with his father who is in prison and calls every two weeks. He doesn't want to talk to his father. He has a bland conversation with him and hangs up the phone. Troy's mother (Tyra Matthews) addresses him on why he acts that way with his father. She says, "I don't know why you acting like that with your daddy...I wish that man

wasn't in prison because maybe he could have taught you some respect." With this I was really interested in not having the father be a character in the show. When working with the actors we worked on creating an image for what the father could look like and what he was like before he went to prison. We created a backstory for him even though it was not written into the script. By making the father simply a figure I wanted the audience to use their imagination for what the father may look like. I think this makes the moment more engaging. It leaves us not only what he may look like, but also what he could be saying on the phone. We can infer a lot about the character even though we don't physically see him or hear him. When writing this I was really thinking about New Orleans and the state of the city that I grew up in. New Orleans has some of the highest incarceration rates in the country. The New Orleans Police Department is notorious for being corrupt, and the state of the prisons are unhealthy for prisoners. Being from the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans, which got hit the hardest during Hurricane Katrina has always been hard. There were nights where I would lay in my bed afraid because I would hear gunshots outside my window. There were nights I would be afraid to go outside to walk the dog because I was afraid of what might happen to me. Not only do Black people have to worry about their living condition, but the people who are supposed to protect and serve are protecting and serving themselves against minority communities for their own benefit. There is a cycle, and it is up to us to not just disrupt the cycle, but to dismantle it altogether.

Speaking of dismantling, in this piece I was constantly thinking about how to re-educate and transform the white mindset. Something I explored a lot specifically in the choreography was the gaze. It is what I am exploring as "The White gaze." There are moments where the dancers are constantly making intense eye contact with the audience. As if to put the pressure on

the audience. To make the audience feel like the spectacle of the piece. It draws them into the piece. It makes them feel responsible and holds them accountable with what they are watching. When making the work there was never a moment that I targeted any of the work towards a white audience. It was for the Black audience. I was of course aware based on my community who would be viewing the piece. I wondered how they may take the work and what they would receive from it. All I wanted was to change their outlook on what it looks like to grow up in the Black community. What it means to not have privilege and what it feels like to lose one of your own based on the color of your skin.

I am really excited that theater and dance has the ability to comment on social/political issues. I think dance and theater are two of the most powerful ways to do this. When I see work that touched on social/political issues it makes me want to mobilize and do something. Theater and dance are both a visceral and emotional experience. There is power in sitting in the theater watching real bodies move through space and feeling real things that we can relate to as humans. Art excites me in this way also because there are so many ways/platforms in art to do this. I think everyone around the world are mobilizing with their art to tell the stories that aren't being told and to fight back with the turmoil that is happening in our world today. With this project I hope to take it back home to New Orleans. I would like to allow the work to exist there to see what it can do for my community. This is work that New Orleans needs to see. A big part of what I want to do with this piece is to also bring it into the school system in New Orleans. There is an educational side to this process that I would like to focus on and teach young black kids how to be safe and how to interact with the police. I am still learning who Jaleel is and who the artist Jaleel is. I am figuring out how they work together and what they both want. As a person and as

an artist what matters to me is aiding people in being as educated as possible. pragmatic. It is a hard thing to put one's pride aside and say that we don't know something. I try to when I can educate people in a healthy way where they don't feel like I am attacking them, but they feel free to be able to learn something new. As an artist what is also important to me is giving my full self to whatever I am creating. I think it is important to give as much as I can. Being fully committed to the work itself. This correlates to my life because I want to be as present and committed in my life as possible. I care about what has come before me and what has happened in my life, which can inform the things that I do and how I navigate spaces in my life and work. While I do think that the artist self and Jaleel as a person informs one another I do sometimes wonder if one gets in the way of the other. Sometimes when I am making work I have to be conscious of both selves and sometimes try to separate them for what's best for the work in moment. I am excited to have seen what this work has done for my community at Bard. Seeing the way the piece affected people after the show because they saw parts of themselves on the stage was one of the most rewarding experiences I could have ever had.

Dance Section 1

In darkness we see a figure of momma appear with the box. All around her as she is having this moment there is the dance happening. The dancers are moving throughout the space moving around her and through her.

Scene 1:

Right after this we have lights come up on momma and she is sitting down watching the news. She is always watching the news in fact the news is always constantly playing in the house. This is a really abrupt moment. We see her watching it then the lights immediately go to black out.

Immediately media comes on as if we are now watching what momma was watching on the television. On the news we see different stories... including that of police brutality.

Momma: That's a damn shame. I don't know what this world is coming to.

She gets up and begins to straighten up the house. She looks at the clock.

Momma: *(To herself)* Where is this boy....?

Troy walks in the house. He is trying to sneak in, but knows that he is caught.

Momma: Where have you been?

Troy: I was out.

Momma: Don't play with me like that. Don't make me ask you again.

Troy: I was with Rocky.

Momma: *(Gives him a look)* Troy, it is one in the morning... and you already know how I feel about HER. I told you that little girl is going to get you in trouble.

Troy: Ma, I love her... you gotta stop talking about her like that. What did she even do to you?

Momma: First of all don't come in my house telling me what i'm gonna do. She ain't did nothing to me. I just don't like her. Nobody will EVER be good enough for my baby. You know what, you need to find somebody just like your mama.

(She begins to leave out).

Troy: Soooooo you cooked something ? I smell food and you know i'm hungry.

Momma: Yup, I cooked. It was your favorite too. Salmon and broccoli with the noodles you like, you know with the angel hair pasta. It's all gone now boo, your momma ate it all. If you would have came home on time maybe you would have had a plate. *(She gives him a petty look)*. But go on in there and make yourself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Troy: (Laughs) You're not gonna let this go, are you?

She stops and comes back.

Momma: *(Getting moderately emotional)* you want me to let things go when everytime I turn on the news it's another black boy being killed by some cop. Not mine. Not my baby. I am not going to let some broad get you into trouble .What do all youngins say? You gonna have to miss me with that.

Troy: Eww mom, Just stop. I'll come home on time as long as you promise to never say that again.

Momma: Boyyyyy you just don't know. Yo momma is down. But i'm not playing with you. Be here before those street lights come on.

.

Troy: Mhm.

Momma: Oh, and son?

Troy: What's up ma?

Momma: Look at the time...

Troy: Uhhhh its...

Momma: TIME TO GET BETTER.

(Momma thinks this is extremely funny, and Troy is trying very hard to hold back his laughter).

Momma: *(Jokingly)* Yup, it's like that. I'm going to bed, I gotta get up for work in the morning. I ain't got time to be out here playing with you when we got all these bills to pay.

Troy: Momma, I told you that I could help you out and get a job.

Momma: Boy please, you know you can't chew gum and walk. I need you to focus on school. Speaking of school that homework BETTER be done.

Troy: *(Skipping over the topic of homework)* Okay, okay. Well, Goodnight Queen.

Momma: Mhm. Goodnight son, love you.

Black out.

Scene 2:

Lights up. We are now at Troy's high school. Troy late to class, and class has already started.

Mr.P: Okay, now who can tell me the answer to number one? In what ways do we see a modern day version of slavery?

Troy walks in 15 minutes late. He tries to sneak in without being seen.

Mr.P: *(Back towards the class)* Mr. Matthews...

Troy: *(cringes because he was trying not to be seen).*

Troy: wassup Mr. P, sorry I'm late I was just--

Mr.P: I'm not interested in any excuses Mr. Matthews. Please have a seat.

(Continues class. Troy sits next to his two friends Cam and Marshall and daps them up before he sits down).

Mr.P: Okay, so raise of hands, who can answer this first question?

Rocky: Thank you Mr. P, when you look at History there is still slavery even today. It has sort of just manifested itself differently in our modern era. For example, I think we are being oppressed institutionally. From the places we live to the people who are in power. It's just one big SHIT SHOW--

Mr. P: Watch your mouth.

Rocky: Sorry. Anyways, I think we need to start thinking proactively about our government and this thing we call separation of powers, and try to question if the power is actually separated equally.

Mr.P: Yes Rocky! What an astute answer! That's the type of thinking it takes. That's the type of work I want you all to be exploring in this class. I need you all to be innovative thinkers.

(The scene between Rocky and Mr.P continues but is faintly happening as we switch over to Troy. Troy is sitting next to his two friends Cam, and Marshall).

Troy: *(To Cam, Whispering)* Yooooo bro.

Cam: Wassup

Troy: Who is she?

Cam: Ummm pretty sure her name is Rocky. Well, if you were paying attention , you would know, Mr. P just said that. Wow bruh, I can tell you don't come to class because she's been here all quarter.

Troy: Yeah whatever, you supposed to be my boy... and you gonna play me like that?

Marshall: *(Whispering Jokingly)* Excuse me young men, if you don't mind Iam attempting t get my edjumacation. Would you mind quieting down please?

Troy: Shut up Marshall. I'm trying to see about this girl, Rocky. Well, i'll call her Rock because that's what she's gonna get when I...*(laughs)*

Mr.P: When you what? Huh? When you what Mr. Matthews? Would you mind sharing with the class?

Troy: No sir!

Mr. P: See me after class please. So your homework for tonight is to read chapters 1-6 and I want you to write a two page response.

(Rocky is ferociously writing in her planner).

Have a great day everyone, see you all tomorrow.

(Rocky packs up all her things quickly and goes to the front of the classroom to Mr.P).

Rocky: Thank you so much for the great class I really enjoyed it.

Mr.P: That's really great Rocky, I'm glad you enjoyed it. How are you? I've been looking at your homework and i've noticed a little less quality.

Rocky: Yeah, I'm so sorry. I've just been SUPER busy with dance rehearsals and I've been getting home really late, so by the time I sit down to do homework i'm basically drooling on my pages.

Mr.P: I see. Do you have any concerts coming up?

Rocky: Yeah! I do actually. Would totally love if you could come.

(Troy awkwardly approaches Mr.P).

Mr.P: Well, Rocky I will see you tomorrow, and please give me more details on the dance concert later?

Rocky: Totally!

(Rocky Exits).

Mr.P: Troy... i'm sure you know exactly what I am about to tell you as I probably sound like a broken record at this point.

Troy: I know, I know... *(Mocks Mr.P sarcastically)* Troy. You have to come to class on time. I can't pass you if you don't do the work... You're a great kid Troy, just a little rough around the edges?

Mr. P: I've never said that.

Mr.P: I'm calling your mother.

Troy: *(Hysterically)* NOOOOOOO. NOOOOOOO. No no no no no. Please don't . You know Mr.P you don't gotta do that. I mean can't we work something out?

(Mr. P hands Troy his telephone).

Mr. P: Dial it please.

(Troy dials the number and hands Mr. P the phone).

Momma: Hello.

Mr. P: Hi, yes, is this Ms. Matthews? Troy's mom?

Momma: This is she.

Mr.P: I was calling about your son. I'm his History teacher and Troy has repeatedly been late to my class, as well as causing disruption to the class as a whole.

Momma: Give Troy the phone.

Troy: *(Hesitates to put the phone to his ear and say hello)* Uhh hello?

Momma: *(Begins nagging Troy being very loud and over the top)* How many times do I have to get a phone call from one of your teachers saying that you at school acting a plum fool? Troy i'm done. *(Mr. P makes a face).* Get home and don't think about staying out. Come directly home from school. Do not pass Go, and do not collect two hundred dollars. You understand me? If you not home in the next fifteen minutes so help me. You gonna need every bit of your lord and savior christ when i'm done with you. You understand me?

Troy: Yes.

Momma: Yes, what?

Troy: Yes ma'am.

Troy begins to walk home and sees his friends outside.

Cam: Bro, so what did Mr.P tell you ?

Marshall: You know he got in trouble again.

Troy: Nahhh you know I'm a G. I told him like how it is. I was like " Mr. P, you always acting all hard and stuff why don't you catch me outside so we can see what them hands do."

Cam: *(Gets Excited and daps Troy up)*

Marshall: Sooooo in other words he called you momma.

Troy: Damn man... yeah... I couldn't just have this one moment Marshall...Like word?

Cam: So you walking home?

Troy:*(Lying)* Yeah. Yeah. My momma told me to come through because you see she needs my help with some stuff around the house.

Cam:*(With persistence)* Bet, so we gonna just come with you. I haven't seen your moms in a while. Let me come say hey to my wife.

Troy: Cam, don't play with my momma like that. We could really square up, honestly.

Cam: Bro, you know I'm joking. I mean the only reason you gettin defensive is because you know i'm yo daddy!

They start walking to Troy's home ...

They arrive and go inside. Momma is standing inside with a belt in her hand. She was waiting for Troy to get home. When they walk inside Cam and Marshall say hey to Troy's mom, and then run out laughing.

Momma: Where you been.

Blackout.

Scene 3:

Lights up. We are back in the house. Troy was just disciplined by his mother. Momma has him cleaning up the entire house. He is scrubbing the floor with a toothbrush. Momma is hovering over him.

Momma: I want you to make sure this house is spotless. Not one piece of dirt.

Troy is looking blankly at the floor.

Momma: *(points to a place on the floor)* What's that?

Troy: I don't see anything.

Momma: Oh, It was nothing. Just wanted to mess with you. *(Chuckles)*.

(Troy continues cleaning, the phone rings)

Momma goes over to the phone and picks it up.

Momma: Hello

Voice recording: This is a collect call from North County correctional facility.

(Momma rolls her eyes and makes a face).

This call will be recorded and monitored. Do you accept?

Momma: I accept.

Momma: Hello.

Momma: Hey, I'm okay. I'm okay. How are you?

Momma: Yeah he's good. *(Momma looks over at Troy as he's still cleaning).*

Momma: I don't know if now's a good time hun.

Momma: I know you want to talk to your son.

Momma: One second, I'll ask him.

Momma: Troy, your daddy is on the phone... come say hey.

Troy: Nah, i'm good ma.

Momma: *(Covers the phone)* Little boy, I wasn't asking you, I was telling you.

Troy walks over and takes the phone.

Troy: *(Unenthused)* What's up pops.

Troy: Yeah, yeah...everything is cool.

Troy: yup, taking care of mom.

Troy: Okay cool. Talk to you later.

Troy: *(hesitant)* Love you too....

Troy hangs up the phone and goes back to cleaning.

(Silence)

Momma: I really don't understand why you acting like that with your daddy.

Troy: Acting like what?

Momma: You know how... acting like he ain't the only daddy you got.

Troy: Ma, you already know how I feel about him.

Momma: I don't care how you feel about him....Troy at the end of the day that's your father. You don't get another one.

Troy: (*Angrily*) Nobody told him to go and do what he did. Nobody pulled that trigger for him, and nobody told him to just forget about his family. So I'm sorry if i'm not exactly excited to talk to him when he calls every two weeks.

Momma: First off, watch your tone with me. Second, I need you to put those feelings aside. Troy can you Just do that for me.

Troy: I don't even know how you are still with that man.

Momma: "That man" is my husband. "That man" is your father. I wish "that man" wasn't in prison because maybe he could have taught you some respect. You know, I did what I could with you Troy, I really did. I don't know what else to do. You only get one father Troy.

Dance Section 2

Scene 4:

We are back at the highschool. Rocky is going into her dance class. Troy sees her and tries to talk to her.

Rocky runs by.

Troy: He-y

Rocky doesn't hear him and walks into the dance class. She begins warming up, and dancing with her classmates. Troy is just watching into the classroom from a distance. Marshall enters.

Marshall: Umm Troy, you good?

Troy: I don't know man. I... I just can't get her (*points*) off my mind. I want to talk to her, but i feel like she's just gonna dub me.

Marshall: She probably will.... But you know what they say. You never know if you never try.

Time begins to slow down

(Troy lip syncs Time Stops)

Marshall: I mean... yeah... That's a really dramatic way of putting it...

Rocky's class is ending and she is packing up her things to leave class. She walks out. Troy approaches her.

Troy: *(Nervously)* HEY. Rocky right? At least I think that's your name. Ugh. I'm Troy. I'm in your History class. With Mr.P. You know he's such a great teacher. History is great stuff.
(Awkward Silence) I saw you dancing in there you look great. I mean like your dancing looks great.

Rocky: Thanks. Oh, you're the one that got your mom called after class!

Troy: Wait... what. How does everyone know that?

Rocky: *(Chuckles)*. I didn't. Now I do.

Troy: Oh I see. You're a little jokester.

Rocky: I try. Umm Roy right?

Troy: Nahh. Troy, but that's pretty close just missing the "T". Then again don't know why I said that because i'm sure you're smart enough to know that.

(Awkward silence.)

Rocky: I'm sorry Troy. *(Emphasizes)*. I'm so bad with names but really good with faces. I'll never forget your face when I meet you.

Troy: I'm gonna hold you to that. Cool! Bet! So I may be wrong, but I think we may be in the same class for the new quarter next week.

Rocky: What class is that?

(Troy takes out a very folded piece of paper and it takes him awhile to unfold it. He has a bunch of folded papers and doesn't know which one is his class schedule).

Troy: Ahh yes! *(Excited)* Advanced Ballet with mr. Dubois.

Rocky: Oh. *(Skeptical)* didn't know you danced.

Troy: Well, you know.... I do dabble here and there.

Rocky: Wow, well aren't you a guy of many gifts. I can see it now... *(gestures to the sky)* "Troy, dancer, paper folder and his greatest talent...getting his mother called after class!" I don't know if you know, but you're gonna be HUGE!

Troy: You are really not letting that go are you?

Rocky: Yeah nah, it's so funny. Comedy GOLD.

Troy: Rocky before you go...

(Time slows down/Stops for Rocky. . "I'm the man" plays).

Time Resumes.

Rocky: *(Waves hands)* Ummm Troy, Hello? You Okay? *(Laughs).*

Troy: Oh Yeah! I'm good. Just was wondering what you were doing tomorrow night?

Rocky: Most likely some studying/homework. Not gonna get into Howard slacking. What schools are you applying to?

Troy: Well you know, all the normal ones.

Rocky: That sounds like you don't know. Have you even started applying?

Troy: Yeah I did.

Rocky: Troy I haven't even known you for that long and I can already tell that you're lying. So whatever plan you had for us tomorrow night... we are going to apply to colleges instead.

Troy: *(Sarcastically)* Oh yay, so exciting can't wait...

Rocky checks her phone.

Troy: Okay bet. It's a date then!

Rocky looks up from her phone.

Rocky: A what?

Troy: *(Pauses)* I'll see you tomorrow!

"I'm the man plays, Troy dances.

Scene 5:

Lights up. We see Troy and Rocky sitting in Troy's house working on college applications.

Rocky: What application are you going to work on first?

Troy: I don't know. I'm not sure. Can I just be honest with you? I haven't really thought about this college stuff. I never really considered going to college before. I don't know I just feel like school is a waste of my time. I don't really see the point. Why would I pay so much money for a piece of paper and an opportunity to walk across someone's stage. Tell me if i'm wrong, but that just doesn't seem realistic to me.

Rocky: I see what you're saying and I think you're totally right.

Troy: *(surprised)* You do?

Rocky: Yeah, but can I be honest with you Troy?

Troy: Yeah, always.

Rocky: I don't think college is about the money or anything like that . I feel like it's about the experience. The people you meet, the new things you experience. The first step is deciding what you're interested in and where you may want to live. Don't hold yourself back. If you could live anywhere and study anything what would it be ?

Troy: Well, I was gonna just stay here in state, so I could be close to my mom. I guess if I could live anywhere I guess I would say California. I just kind of have always wanted to go there.... Not sure why. I always joke with my mom and tell her that we gonna leave this place and live in Malibu. That's a dream.

Rocky: There are a lot of schools in California so you better start searching. What would you want to study?

Troy: *(indecisive)* Not gonna lie... haven't thought a lot about this because I never thought that i'd make it this far in the process, but maybe History. Like Mr.P did.

Rocky: Maybe you should talk to Mr.P about your interest in History. I'm sure he could help you make a plan or figure out what schools might be best for you to apply to.

Troy: Yeah i'll definitely have to do that.

(Rocky is focused on her applications)

Troy: Hey Rocky.

(Rocky looks up and Troy kisses her. They begin to make out and they are intimate with one another.)

Blackout.

Scene 6:

Ballet class. Troy walks into the dance room and it is a bunch of dancers stretching and doing warm ups. He looks around for ways that he can fit in. He is trying to copy some of the stretches he sees.

Rocky walks over.

Rocky:*(Chuckles)* Those hammies look a little tight.

Troy: Yeah I haven't stretched in a while

Rocky: *(Starts doing crazy stretches)* For sure, same.

Rocky: I know you said that you have danced before, but all I can do is warn you and say good luck.

Troy: What do you mean good luck?

(Mr. Dubois struts into the room making his presence known. His assistant runs up to him).

Mr. D: *(To his assistant)* I do not care if you have to go all around the world in eighty days, find me those doughnuts!

(Assistant begins to leave)

Mr. D: *(Frustrated)* Not now. It is class time!

(Everyone springs up to a fifth position, everyone except Troy).

(Mr. D looks around to analyze the room)

Mr.D: *(Goes up to Troy)* Excuse me. One of these things does not look like the others.

(Troy looks around and slowly mimics the dancers around him).

Mr. D: That's right. Pull up everyone. You all need to pull up more! You all want to be dancers, but I see a bunch of wimps. A bunch of people who don't want it bad enough. I have produced some of the best dancers of our time. All of my students go on to be successful. Any pamphlet you see with a dancer on the front had probably been my student at some point. Everyone go and grab your phones.

(Everyone grabs their phones).

Mr. D: Google me. I am THE Reginald Dubois. You should always know who you're in front of. I could be a MURDERER, and if the police come and asked you who I was all you could show them is this. *(Does a simple Ballet step)*. They're going to look at you like you have lost your minds. Okay. Enough of me, go put those devils down.

(Dancers moving slowly)

Mr. D: Ummm quickly dancers I don't have all day. *(Waits)*. I would like to start off with a combination.

(Gives combo, but doesn't really show anything in depth or full out. His assistant looks confused. The dancers are all trying to figure out the moves).

Mr.D: *(Turns around)* Okay, Let me see. Actually *(Turns to assistant)* Let me see you do it. Show it to them first.

(The assistant does the movement they think is right).

Mr D: Do you really think that's what I just did? You're supposed to have danced for great choreographers and you think that's what I did? Why are you here if you can't do the steps I am asking you to do? How about you go do something you're good at. How about you go sit over there and press the play button.

(Mr. D shows the movement a little more).

Mr.D: Here we go. 5,6,7,8...

(All the dancers get the movement and Troy is flopping around everywhere).

Mr.D: Oh my goodness. I don't know what I just watched. Rocky. Please come show the combination for me please.

(Rocky shows the combination effortlessly).

Mr.D: See dancers? That is what this is about. You have to focus. You all can leave.
(Everyone starts to leave . Mr.D gestures to Troy).

Rocky: Troy, you coming?

Troy: Yeah, give me a sec.

Mr.D: This is not the class for you. Consider this your last day. Thank you.

Blackout.

Scene 7:

Troy is shooting dice outside with a few of his friends and they are having a blast. A white woman is passing by and she keeps looking over at them. One of Troy's friends look at her and begins to cat call at her. She is clearly uncomfortable and begins to speed off pretending to be on her phone. She calls the police.

Dispatch: 911 what is your emergency?

Woman: ummm hello, yes, I just feel really scared because there were a few people by the street corner and they looked like they maybe had drugs and possibly a gun. It's possible they were

juveniles and its possible they were planning to go do something. I think I overheard them saying that.

Dispatch: Okay ma'am are you safe?

Woman: Yes, for now... I'm just scare they may follow after me. Please hurry.

Dispatch: Okay, law enforcement is on the way.

There is distorted music and sound from 911 calls from Trayvon Martin. The dancers are dancing inside the scrim with a rope. There is a projection of a large gun shooting in slow motion on the scrim at Troy. Troy and officer fields enter and stare at one another. Troy is shot by law enforcement.

Blackout.

Dance:

Rocky dances a solo dance.

Scene 8:

Momma is on the stance and she has a very cold look on her face. She is Angry, but has not had enough proper time to mourn her son's death. Momma is the plaintiff.

Defendant: Please state your name.

Plaintiff: My name is Tyra Matthews.

Defendant: What is your home address?

Plaintiff: 3205 Delery Drive, New Orleans, Louisiana, 70117.

Judge: This is the court case of Matthews vs. Officer Fields. Will the Plaintiff please proceed.

Defendant: Thank you your honor. I just want to start off by saying that I am deeply sorry for your loss.

Judge: Please stick to the case. Do not deviate in my courtroom.

Defendant: My apologies your honor. Ms. Matthews, what was your son's name?

Plaintiff: Troy Tyrone Matthews.

Defendant: Ms. Matthews can you please share with the jury what brings you to the courtroom today?

Plaintiff: I am here because my son was wrongly killed by officer fields.

Defendant: Where was your son the night he died?

Plaintiff: He was with his friends playing.

Defendant: How do you know that to be true ?

Plaintiff: I know that because I texted my son and he told me where he was. I told him to come home soon because it was getting late.

Defendant: How do you know that he would have listened to you and come home?

Plaintiff: Because I know my son.

Defendant: Is it safe to say that it is possible that your son wouldn't have listened to you and not come home and do other things?

Plaintiff: No. That is not my son. Once again I know my son and I know he wouldn't do that.

Defendant: Ms. Matthews you believe that Mr. Fields wrongly killed your son the night of your son's death. Is that correct?

Plaintiff: That is correct.

Defendant: Is it safe to say that if your son was in fact killed by Mr. Fields and it was Mr. Fields doing his job and defending himself from your son, that then it was your son that was responsible for his own death?

Momma's Lawyer: Objection!

Judge: Sustained.

Plaintiff: *(Waits to answer)* No that is not true. That is not a true statement.

Dance Section 3

There are pictures of black men and boys projected onto the scrim as the dancers dance.

This section repeats two more times.

Defendant: How do you know that he would have listened to you and come home?

Plaintiff: Because I know my son.

Defendant: Is it safe to say that it is possible that your son wouldn't have listened to you and not come home and do other things?

Plaintiff: No. That is not my son. Once again I know my son and I know he wouldn't do that.

Defendant: Ms. Matthews you believe that Mr. Fields wrongly killed your son the night of your son's death. Is that correct?

Plaintiff: That is correct.

Defendant: Is it safe to say that if your son was in fact killed by Mr. Fields and it was Mr. Fields doing his job and defending himself from your son, that then it was your son that was responsible for his own death?

Momma's Lawyer: Objection!

Judge: Sustained.

Plaintiff: *(Waits to answer)* No that is not true. That is not a true statement.

Scene 9:

There is a knock at the door. The mother goes outside and looks around and sees no one there. There is a box sitting at the doorstep of the mother's home. She walks outside to see who

knocked and looks down and sees a box. The box is brown. She picks the box up and brings it into the house.

She has a moment of shock. In the box is all of her son's belongings the night that he was killed by the police. She just stares at the box and takes out the belongings one by one. Each one she touches and picks up her son's black hoodie and smells it. The smell reminds her of her baby boy.

*There is a moment where momma is on her knees and she has a moment of grief with the box and the items inside. Momma sings *The Color Purple* and leaves the box with the hoodie on top of it.*

Blackout.

End.