



The HawtPlates'
*Water Boy and the
Mighty World*,
the Bushwick
Starr, New York,
2019. Photo: Maria
Baranova-Suzuki

Forum

BLACK THEATER, UNDER PRESSURE

FAEDRA CHATARD CARPENTER, SOYICA DIGGS COLBERT,
MARTINE KEI GREEN-ROGERS, JAMES IJAMES,
KHALID YAYA LONG, TORI SAMPSON, LISA B. THOMPSON,
LOY A. WEBB, AND NIA O. WITHERSPOON

Edited and introduced by Isaiah Matthew Wooden

Black theater is always under pressure—to entertain, to challenge, to inform, to provoke, to represent, among other things. Correspondingly, Black theater artists often come to know and understand pressure quite intimately. In envisioning and curating this forum, my aim was to bring together an array of leading voices in contemporary Black theater—playwrights, performers, directors, dramaturgs, scholars, and professors—to examine trends and innovations in the field and to reflect on the significance of the pressures on their own artistic, scholarly, and pedagogical work. I was inspired, in part, by the rich conversations I was having with colleagues in both academic and professional theater spaces about the complex representations of Blackness that we were encountering on various stages in the putative post-Obama era. (I offer particular thanks to performance scholar Jasmine E. Johnson for the initial nudge to put together a forum.) I was similarly compelled by the illuminating discussions this work was generating among my students in the classroom.

I committed early on to seeking out participants who, in addition to being shrewd and sophisticated thinkers and theorists, have also spent considerable time in rehearsal rooms in recent years. First, I wanted the discussion to avoid devolving into abstractions (or even flagrant dismissals, as too much of the social media–driven commentary on Black art now routinely does) and, instead, to remain grounded in the unique experiences and perspectives that participating in the collaborative process often yields. Second, I wanted it to further evidence the ways that, for many Black theater artists, it is impossible to decouple practice and theory.

To that end, I circulated a set of questions to participants via email in September 2019, offering them the option of either responding in writing or arranging a conversation with me that I would later transcribe. I was clear that they need not be restricted to a particular form; there was space for responses that were critical, creative, and/or anecdotal. Once I received and collated the initial replies, I then recirculated them to the group in January 2020, inviting each member to emend or expand where necessary and to attend to any connections or resonances across the discussion. What follows is the outcome of these generative exchanges, which, even as they reflect the enthusiasm and optimism of a recent past that, in some ways, feels very distant, remain remarkably relevant and illuminating.

Of course, not long after I began editing the forum for length and clarity and ordering the responses to call attention to reverberant themes in February 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic would force live performance venues around the globe to suspend operations for nearly two years, thereby bringing a halt to much of the momentum that participants observed had been building around Black theater in the preceding months. The murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers on May 25, 2020, and the uprisings and rebellions that erupted in the weeks thereafter, would further serve to activate much-needed reckonings with our failures to imagine and build a more just world. Living through these converging crises crystallized for many of us the urgent need to upend the structures, systems, and institutions—academic and professional theater, among them—bolstering racism, anti-Blackness, and other forms of bigotry in our society. While this work, no doubt, remains ongoing, it has been especially heartening to witness the bold and creative ways that Black theater makers have used their artistry to example what it might mean to imagine and embody new worlds.

Although it emerged out of the pleasures (and pressures) of a particular context, I remain deeply inspired by the range and richness of the discussion reflected in this forum. I anticipate that it will open up many new lines of inquiry and ways of thinking about the work—the possibilities—of both pressure *and* Black theater for years to come.

I.

ISAIAH MATTHEW WOODEN *The abundance of new work by Black theater artists being produced on stages large and small around the country (and, indeed, across the globe) has generated considerable conversation in recent years. A number of national and international publications, for example, have featured articles examining the ways that Black theater makers are fundamentally transforming the theatrical and cultural landscapes by creating work that is at once formally and dramaturgically inventive and abounding with cultural insights and critiques. While I recognize that some of this attention stems from a profound ignorance about the vastness and thickness of Black theater history (as well as a broader cultural compulsion to fetishize the “new”), I am also cognizant of the opportunity it affords us to pause and consider what is perhaps singular, remarkable, and/or compelling about what’s happening in Black theater. With this in mind, I’d like you to consider the following questions: How would you characterize what some are citing as a remarkably fecund era in Black theatrical production? What excites you most about it? What do you see as some of its distinguishing features? What are some of the ways it repeats and revises earlier moments in Black theater history? And what does it perhaps foretell about the future of Black theatrical practice?*

FAEDRA CHATARD CARPENTER As both a pedagogue and dramaturg, the notion of caretaking is particularly potent for me, and part and parcel of this caretaking is a deep consideration of what “for us”—as in the Du Boisian “by us, for us, about us, near us”—means. And, while I do not hold W. E. B. Du Bois’s proposals as unmitigated standards with which to determine the legitimacy of Black theater (he was writing in 1926, after all), I unequivocally embrace the belief that Black

theater is by and for Black people. This, I hope it goes without saying, is not to the exclusion of other artists or audience members, but to the insistence that Black people’s presence, perspectives, and participation are integral to the processes of our theater making—and the purpose of our theater meetings (those crucial signatures of a Black theater happening—the communal components related to sociopolitical efficacy or cultural affirmations found through shared understandings).

I think of all this when I think of the seeming fecundity of Black theater in the here and now, and although I find the concentrated attention heartening, I also feel a need to underscore that the shift in media coverage and allotted season slots—while something to celebrate—is not representative of a shift in productivity or quality. As Jerald Raymond Pierce aptly notes, “Rather than saying there’s a new wave of Black playwrights sweeping the nation, it’s better to say that us theaters are at last waking up to the many writers already out there doing important work.”¹ Yes, presently there is an encouraging abundance of Black playwrights receiving critical recognition, but we do well to remind ourselves that we have long had Black dramatists creating important, innovative, compelling, daring—and didactic, difficult, and straight-up problematic—work. Accordingly, the spectra of these most current creations run the gamut—just like Black folks themselves—earning praise as groundbreaking and potentially canonical, as well as earning noteworthy consternation (as in, “Please take note of what *not* to do!”). Shifts and turns do not necessarily lead to progress; not all revolves initiate righteous revolutions.

NIA O. WITHERSPOON Three chairs sit in a triangle, as much facing each other as they face the audience. A single Black woman



The HawtPlates' *Water Boy and the Mighty World*. Photo: Maria Baranova-Suzuki

with a shaved head enters. She takes off her shoes. She opens up a box that is at once suitcase, altar, spellbook, and liturgical sheet music. She closes a gate, in the form of a wooden bar that sits low to the ground. She sits, breathes, readies herself. Another Black woman, this time with long locks, enters and does the same. And, finally, a Black man enters and does the same. They gaze at one another—a look of knowing, of love, and of peace. They breathe together. And they proceed to launch into one of the most compelling sonic journeys I have ever witnessed, drawn from Odetta Holmes's archives of civil rights music, and weaving in and through the story of the American legend Bass Reeves, the first-ever Black police officer. The piece as a whole—*Waterboy and the Mighty World* by the Hawtplates—is profound. But it is this first

moment—of entering, of setting, of closing gates, and of establishing connection with each other—that for me defines the Black theater and performance at this moment that I am the most invested in.

This moment articulates a Black theater of self-possession. And self-possession is a precious thing that Black folks are not and have not been afforded. And also a thing that we can give to ourselves and to each other, *no matter what*. In this triangular moment offered by the Hawtplates, we also witness a redefinition of self-possession as they gaze from one to the other inside what feels like an eternity before they even acknowledge an audience, an/other outside their own sacred familial bond—*They are a self. They are whole*. The triangle can stand on its own; it owns itself. We remember that for us, the one is many, like the

Yoruba concept of the soul, divided into three parts. The Western individual subject—the self—becomes kaleidoscopically plural—the selves that Sarah articulates in Adrienne Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, or Gurl’s “I I I I” in Sharon Bridgforth’s *delta dandi*. Reestablishing sovereignty over time, time signature, space, and the physical and metaphysical boundaries that guard space and over body, what the boundaries of that body are, and how that body is afforded care, companionship, and, yes, love. Loving each other, in public, to remix an oft-cited James Baldwin quote. And that feels like some kind of justice, indeed. And also, it does not feel like theater. It is, as I have come to call it, “broken theater,” which is another way of naming this Black theater of (multi-)self-possession. I want to break theater, I say.

At the end of Jackie Sibblies Drury’s *Fairview*, a Black woman actor leaves the stage and directly asks that white audience members get onstage so that she can begin telling her *actual* story. It is the biggest heartbreak that the play ends there. At the end of Aleshea Harris’s *What to Send Up When It Goes Down*, the white audience members are asked to leave so that we can stay and scream. For a new and necessary beginning, only for us. The Hawtplates start here, at this beginning. I try to start here too.

We are also, as a result of this (multi) self-possession, reckoning with the violence against our bodies and the bodies of our ancestors, on our own terms. In my own work that looks like restaging Diamond Reynold’s Facebook Live posting just after Philando Castile was shot inside the Yoruba creation story of Knowledge, Wisdom, and Understanding set to the beat of Cardi B, who reminds the white public, “You can’t fuck with me, if you wanted to.” It is Sharon Bridgforth in *Dat Black Mer-*

maid Man Lady buying a house for divinations that ultimately will be given to a Black queer woman in the wake of San Francisco gentrification. It is a dancer in Nichi Douglass’s “where love lies fallow” who busts open space and place with house choreography and stops every five minutes to sip water, and *takes her time*. It is a seed planted in the 1960s with the Black arts movement that I don’t feel we have seen come to fruition until these moments.

SOYICA DIGGS COLBERT George C. Wolfe’s *The Colored Museum* (1986) ushered forth an intertextual conversation in African American theater about representing Blackness onstage, particularly given Broadway’s and major regional theaters’ penchant for producing Black realist dramas. Although Wolfe’s play explicitly engages Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, August Wilson’s transformative impact on American theater (Broadway premieres 1984–2017) would further cement Black realism as producers’ preferred mode of Black expression. Jackie Sibblies Drury’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Fairview* directly engages the predominance of realism in American drama generally and Black American drama specifically, suggesting that realism enables the surveillance at the heart of watching Black people onstage.

Decades earlier in the *Village Voice*, Lorraine Hansberry and Norman Mailer debated what form better suited making Black experiences legible in the American theater. Hansberry and Mailer’s debate centered on Jean Genet’s *The Blacks: A Clown Show*. Mailer lamented that, as depicted in Genet’s play, Black people’s thirst for the good life evacuated them of their radical working-class ethos, which he argued was best expressed through formal intervention.² Hansberry charged back, insulted by the implication of Black people’s radicalism being tied to their

material poverty, that the use of the theater of the absurd as the formal vehicle to critique Black striving amounted to a myopic politic.³ She also questioned the assumption that white people controlled watching. Both thematically and formally, *Fairview* takes up the questions at the heart of the Hansberry-Mailer debate, staging a play that begins as a realist family drama and devolves into an absurd racial fantasy. Drury's play asserts that writing in the wake of the revolutionary histories of the mid-twentieth century requires that one destroy realism and white attachments to its quotidian family sensibilities in order to clear space for the representation of Black people in the theater. Along with *Fairview*, Jeremy O. Harris's *Slave Play* asks what racial histories we must work through in order to hear Black women's voices and for Black women to appear onstage. The plays, however, assume that appearance requires the disruption of the white gaze.

KHALID YAYA LONG We are witnessing a Black cultural renaissance that expands on both the politics and the aesthetics innovated during the Negro renaissance of the early twentieth century, the Black arts movement of the 1960s, and the Black feminist movement of the 1970s. As such, Black theater today maintains the tradition of amplifying the voices of those within some of the most vulnerable communities. Even more, Black theater today inspires and entertains. Black theater today is intellectual. Black theater today incites social action. Black theater today is kitschy. Black theater today offers relief from the pressures of social (and personal) responsibilities. Black theater today embraces inclusivity (at least more than it did in the past, but there's still work to do). Black theater today is boldly queer. Black theater today gives new meaning to the phrase "here to stay."

TORI SAMPSON Black people have been making a splash in theater since forever. Given this, I think I have a somewhat disappointing answer to these questions. I don't think we're in a particular moment or period right now. I don't think there's anything different about what's going on. If I had to offer up a defining feature, something that has perhaps changed in recent times, I would say the use of social media. However, as it pertains to the art—as it pertains to Black artists who are creating new work—I don't think we're in a moment or period. Patterns in theatrical production tend to be cyclical. We'll go four, five, or six years where plays by white men are dominating, and then people will become tired of that and be eager to hear from and produce other voices. You could call it a "renaissance" if you want to, but it's a part of a larger pattern.

I do think that social media has made a difference. It's exciting because, when you think about theater in general, but specifically the American theater, it is well behind the rest of the entertainment industry in terms of inclusivity, marketing, the voices that we're inviting in, and the voices we're publicizing. There's always been such a tradition about what it means to participate in the American theater—how you're supposed to act and present yourself; how you're supposed to walk through the world as a playwright or as an actor or director. That's been, in part, because the exposure was limited and filtered through the lens of particular institutions. Now theater makers have a platform to tell their own stories outside the stories that they're putting onstage. Who am I? What are my politics? What do I believe in? Who am I outside of being a theater maker? Social media allows us to not only describe who we are and put our personalities out there, but also to connect with like-minded people.



JAMES JAMES The sheer amount of Black theater happening right now feels unprecedented, and I think what makes it even more extraordinary is the variety of styles, voices, content, and practices on display. It seems to be demanding that theater audiences recognize that there is no singular narrative of Black life. With that diversity of experiences within Blackness, we also encounter a ton of approaches to telling those stories both stylistically and structurally. White folks have been given this latitude from the beginning, but Black folks have historically had to run the gauntlet of producers, critics, and scholars who demand that Black theater look, feel, and talk in a particular way. What we are currently enjoying is the rejection of that notion.

I am particularly excited that this moment is largely being led by Black women and Black LGBTQIA people. From the early

plays of Suzan-Lori Parks and Lynn Nottage to the genius of Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, Antoinette Nwandu, and Aleshea Harris, Black writers are, to paraphrase Audre Lorde, dismantling the master's house with plays that use humor, horror, sex, and radical political theory. This wellspring of writers is unnerving audiences and pushing the craft of playwriting forward. These plays don't depend on Aristotle to tell them how to look. They take the canon to task and disrupt the assumption that what has been is what must always be. Additionally, this moment has offered us a huge influx of plays that examine the global Black experience through the work of people like Danai Gurira and Jocelyn Bioh, as well as the uniquely complex experiences of first- and second-generation immigrants from across the African continent. This infusion of robust Black theater production is happen-

Jennifer Pagán and Trina Reynolds-Tyler participate in Kristiana Rae Colón's #BlackSexMatters. Photo: Reginald Eldridge Jr. Courtesy of Kristiana Rae Colón

ing in the wake of the disappearance of many of the country's Black theater companies. Yet the plays and the productions continue to be undeniably Black.

LOY A. WEBB This time in theatrical history, especially as it pertains to Black theater artists, feels particularly rich. I remember being in New York as I prepared for the off Broadway debut of my play *The Light*. A lot of my colleagues had made, were making, or were preparing to make their debuts. It felt like an echo of the Harlem Renaissance era. This surge of Black brilliant literary minds bursting all onto the scene at once. In past years, let's say the post–August Wilson era, we had Black playwrights come onto the scene in pockets—maybe a couple here, a couple there—but there wasn't this great tidal wave of new Black voices like we've recently seen. And for me, being new to the New York theater scene from Chicago, it brought me so much joy to be at the start of my career and to have brothers and sisters in literary arms beside me beginning that journey.

It is inspiring, and I'm grateful to be a witness to so many of my colleagues and their contribution to this art form. However, while I have all these positive feelings, I still have some trepidations. I've had conversations with a friend who has been in this game awhile. They expressed that, while this moment is great, they are skeptical of it—primarily because they wonder if this moment is happening because Black stories are “on trend” right now, or if the institutions that are programming Black stories are interested and committed to transforming the culture such that the telling of Black stories becomes a part of the theatrical fabric for years to come. This is the source of my trepidation too. But I'm a hopeful person, and I ultimately believe that

our work is dynamic and integral to the fabric of the American theater, our stories will never be forced to the periphery again. In other words, even if these institutions are programming us for “on trend” reasons, Black American life is like fine garments—no matter the time, our lives never go out of style.

MARTINE KEI GREEN-ROGERS I think this seeming abundance of Black theater is amazing, and, indeed, it is about time that it has happened. I too worry, however, that majority-white theaters' producing works by Black artists (and the resultant press this has garnered) is only a trend, as opposed to part of larger systemic changes. Only time will tell on this, and I hope I am worrying for nothing.

I also wish that more money was being directed toward culturally specific theaters. These theaters have been doing this work the entire time and have gotten little credit outside the Black community for the work they have done to foster and cultivate new voices. I recall theaters as early as the African Company and how the work it was doing was so interesting and brilliant that white people would come out in droves to see it. I also worry about how much of that interest borders on cultural voyeurism. I don't think that the intention is malicious, but I do wonder whether some of the interest by predominantly white institutions (PWIs) in Black theater is steeped in participating in “performative wokeness,” as opposed to a genuine interest in the stories of Black people. I worry because the move in interest by PWIs away from Black narratives about slavery feels slow.

Works like *Underground Railroad Game* and *Slave Play* live in this nebulous territory. These narratives remain in the realm of dealing with the legacy of slavery, are super popular with white audiences, have caused a lot

of conversation within the Black artist community (and elsewhere), and push us to think about moving forward through the events of the past. I think it is a move forward, for sure, but I am also wondering where is the interest in *all* stories—not just that particular type of story. I do think that success in PWIS is not paramount to forward progress, but I am always questioning what the mainstream narratives about Blackness presented onstage look like and the forms they take, since much arts funding, unfortunately, lands at the doorstep of these particular institutions.

I do, however, look to artists such as Charly Evon Simpson, Tarell Alvin McCraney, Christina Anderson, and a whole host of others who came before and will come after, and how they are shifting the tides and creating a new canon of work. I am optimistic and excited—and cautious!

LISA B. THOMPSON In February 2016, I wrote an essay for Mark Anthony Neal's *NewBlackMan (in Exile)* site called "A Black Theatrical Renaissance in the #BlackLivesMatter Era" that addressed what I considered to be a "moment" at that point. I also wrote something after that year's Tony Awards and seeing all the diversity there (it was the year of *Hamilton*, *Shuffle Along*, and *Eclipsed*). I'm glad the conversation is now catching up to me!

What strikes me most about this period is seeing theater artists articulate a broader vision of Blackness. We now have playwrights such as Danai Gurira, Mfoniso Udofia, and Jocelyn Bioh, children of African immigrants or first-generation migrants, telling stories imbued with an Afropolitan theatrical aesthetic. We also have Black queer men like Colman Domingo, Donja Love, Tarell Alvin McCraney, and Marcus Gardley telling a broad variety of stories from that per-

spective. For instance, Domingo's third play, *Dot*, includes a Black matriarch with dementia, her gay son, his white partner and white ex-girlfriend, two daughters (one who is a lawyer and single mother, and another who is a reality show star), plus a caregiver from Kazakhstan. That's what's exciting to me. We're getting this broader vision of the Black experience and Black humanity. We still have further to go. While I'm heartened that the work of Donnetta Lavinia Grays is starting to receive attention, Black lesbians have not had their "moment."

I'm pushing myself to include a broader representation of Black life in my own work. Although I worked on my play *The Mama-logues* for a long time, it was not until a few months before it premiered that I realized that one of the characters was a lesbian. During a talkback, someone asked me why I made that change, and I said, I simply wanted to tell the truth: my life, my world is not made up of only straight people. This isn't a first for me. In my play *Single Black Female*, one of the characters is a Black bisexual woman, which gave some folks pause when it premiered twenty years ago.

What I would still like to see reflected more in Black theater, as well as in my own work, are worlds that are not solely made up of able-bodied people. A person with a disability should not appear in a play as a symbol or metaphor, but they should be there because Black people with different bodies represent the truth of the worlds we live in. There are people in my life with various differences and that should be reflected in my work. That's the kind of inclusion Black playwrights have control over. That's certainly a pressure point that we should immediately address.

II.

ISAIAH MATTHEW WOODEN *I want to now pose two different, though related sets of questions. First, perhaps you might comment on how you see Black theater artists applying pressure in their work. To what end? What possibilities does applying pressure open for the Black theatrical and dramaturgical imaginations? For our politics and lived realities? Second, what are some of the pressure points that still require greater attention from Black artists? Why is Black theater an especially potent site to take on these areas of sensitivity? What can theater perhaps reveal about these sore/soft spots? How might it be mobilized to repair them?*

MARTINE KEI GREEN-ROGERS Theater does not move forward, forge new spaces, and create exciting conversations without putting pressure on the characters and stories we tell. Dramaturgically, it is absolutely necessary. With that, the physical and mental effects of that force on those who write the works that apply pressure, those who help realize that pressure onstage, those who witness those works, or those who talk about that work (either after

performances or as part of their pedagogy) cannot be ignored.

This pressure manifests in different ways. I think of pieces that ask audiences to sit in their racialized discomfort (like *Fairview*, *Slave Play*, and *An Octoroon*). I also think about plays that deal with class and Black complicity in replicating white supremacy (such as Lydia Diamond's *Stick Fly*) and love how they open up new possibilities via the conversations they create. What is exciting to me is how all these plays apply pressure, but, depending on how one identifies, that pressure can vary in content and impact. I think the pressure placed on white people is different in *Slave Play* than in *Fairview*. Yet the same can be said about the pressure placed on Black people seeing the same two shows. The myriad of racialized human experiences that can be tapped into by these two plays has moved us away from the “universal truth” that seems to be perpetuated as a narrative for why plays by people of color should be done by PWIS. To be more specific, I think the vocabulary that was once used to explain why white audiences should see plays by August Wilson and other playwrights of color cannot be used in this instance. There is no “universal” experience at the center of *Slave Play* or *Fairview*, and that is an amazing dramaturgical difference in how we will talk about these plays in years to come.

Ultimately, I think Black artists need to worry less about appealing to predominantly white audiences, and PWIS need to work harder on illustrating the value to their current audiences (and the ones they have yet to build) of all types of stories. I think concepts like “producibility” and “broad appeal” tend to be rooted in Eurocentric capitalist values that limit the theater and the Black artists who are attempting to stay within those concepts in order to have their work taken seriously and, indeed, to make a living doing the work. The

Colman Domingo's
Dot, Vineyard
Theatre, New York,
2016. Photo:
Carol Rosegg.
Courtesy of the
Vineyard Theatre



shows that push against those boundaries are the ones that apply pressure and serve to make us rethink the types of care that can be found in the theater.

LOY A. WEBB I feel Black artists are applying pressure by being less censored in the issues they put onstage. There's a boldness to the work. There's no line toting. They pick an angle for the story without necessarily giving thought to the comfortability of those watching. Of course, we must give credit to our theatrical foremothers and fathers. Alice Childress is one of my favorites because she had an unbridled voice. Even in the 1950s, with plays like *Trouble in Mind*, she was not afraid to say what she believed. It cost her, but we can speak freely now because of the costs that she and others paid. And now, it's being done with more artists, so that pressure has no choice but to bear on our social and political climate.

FAEDRA CHATARD CARPENTER Prioritizing a dramaturgy of care feels particularly urgent and necessary at this moment. In recent months, I have seen four "Black plays" at major regional theaters in the DC metro area, each of them garnering notable attention via substantial media coverage, high ticket sales, and the promise of already scheduled, future stagings—but not all of them exhibited evidence of a "dramaturgy of care." Case in point: the most flagrant offender signaled a paucity of artistic and communal investment as soon as I opened the pages of the program. Aside from the setting/character page and an all-too-brief (and thus very vague) interview with the playwright, the producing theater company had no dramaturgical framing, insight, or offerings for its audience. This certainly is not an injury in itself, but the actual production gave proof to a dramaturgy of negligence: ineffectual casting; flat, one-dimensional

characterizations teetering on stereotypes; didactic diatribes; and misogynistic messaging were among the presentation's missteps. Nevertheless, the comfort of familiarity and accessibility is pushing this piece forward to coveted venues. *For why?*

Aleshea Harris's *What to Send Up When It Goes Down* (produced by New York's Movement Theater Company and presented at Washington, DC's Woolly Mammoth Theater Company) serves as a paradigmatic pillar when it comes to staging what pioneering, awe-inspiring, fortifying, and efficacious Black theater can look like (no spoilers here: it is one that should be experienced rather than narrated). That being said, I would like to highlight Harris's unapologetic commitment to creating a theatrical offering and communal experience *for* Black people. Within the very first moment of the play's opening, one of the performers articulates the playwright's intentions with gentle assurance:

Let me be clear: this ritual is first and
foremost
for Black people.
Again. We are glad non-Black people
are here.
We welcome you but this piece was
created
and is expressed with Black folks in
mind. If
you are prepared to honor that through
your
respectful, conscientious presence, you
are
welcome to stay.⁴

While the aim of *What to Send Up* is concretized by this opening scene, I also really want to underscore how this calling



Lisa B. Thompson's *The Mamalogues*, Theatre Tuscaloosa, Shelton State Community College, Tuscaloosa, AL, 2022. Photo: Porfirio Solórzano

was already made palpable through the dramaturgical framing offered by the Movement Theater Company. Harris's play/pageant/ritual/homecoming celebration is framed by a room that patrons are beckoned into: a room filled with the countless pictures of individual Black people whose lives have been claimed by anti-Black violence. The audience is faced with seeing the visages of men and women, boys and girls, the familiar and the heretofore unknown. They are encouraged to face these faces, encouraged to remember the stories and catalog the images and the names—but audience members are also gifted with tools of comfort. Kleenex is in near reach and, strikingly, iPad/headphone stations featuring the routines of stand-up comics. The plac-

ard next to the iPads read, "Need to take a breath? Check out our laugh station and take a moment to collect yourself." The production, in its entirety, is symbolic of a dramaturgy of care: unabashedly designed for us yet committed to an understanding and sensitivity toward all; respecting of individual complexity and variant thresholds; a buoying of spirits in service of communal resilience. A relief of the pressure.

KHALID YAYA LONG There are several Black women theater artists whom I admire for the ways they create theater with a sense of urgency. I immediately think of Dominique Morisseau, Christina Anderson, Kirsten Greenidge, and Kristiana Rae Colón, among

others. These sistah-playwrights (to borrow Sandra Shannon's term for Black women dramatists who write about the inhumane treatment of Black folk) have penned dramas that speak directly to what is happening within marginalized communities. They center underrepresented, vulnerable, and oftentimes ignored people in their work.

I recently had the opportunity to work with Colón while she served as the inaugural Madeleine Moore Burrell Playwriting Fellow at Columbia College Chicago. An activist in every sense of the word, Colón is the creator of #BlackSexMatters and codirector of the #LetUsBreathe Collective, a coalition of artist-activists that came together after the death of Mike Brown and the Ferguson uprisings and whose primary mission is to promote transformation and healing by disrupting systems of oppression and centering marginalized voices.

What first attracted me to Colón's work was her use of the term *abolitionist theater* to identify her dramas. Colón not only writes with a sense of urgency, but her work moves beyond the notion that theater is a reflection of society. Undeniably, her work offers a critique of society, but it does so much more. Take, for example, her play *homan & fillmore*—named for an intersection in Chicago where Colón and her #LetUsBreathe collective launched a forty-five-day protest encampment in a vacant lot across the street from Homan Square, a building speculated to be a black site operated by the Chicago Police Department. The collective named the space Freedom Square and modeled it after maroon communities and the act of marronage where oppressed folks (historically, enslaved folks) found liberation by claiming land as a sovereign space and practiced self-governance. *homan & fillmore* centers on the events that took place at Freedom

Square, thus imagining a world where there are no police, no prisons, no carceral punishment, and where the community provides free resources such as food, daycare services, and libraries. I would say that Colón is prophetic, for she uses her plays to envision a world that is equitable, diverse, and inclusive. Her work illustrates the possibilities of a socially just world. That is the very essence of abolitionist theater: envision a liberated world for the stage and then materialize it on the streets.

NIA O. WITHERSPOON We apply pressure when we name whiteness and refuse to be a part of the universal “we,” or redefine that universal “we” as us. When we become the center and the measuring stick and the barometer. We apply pressure when we make revivals and dreaming chambers and say like Jay-Z, “I’ll do you one better and slay these niggas faithfully.” With a Black theater of self-possession, the niggas we slaying are the white supremacist restrictive structures of what theater is and can be. The theater we are making insists that our grandmothers, whether singing in church choirs, healing with hands, or crafting revival services, or our grandfathers—taking and selling photographs at the nightclubs full of fugitives from the South during the Great Migrations—were more than worthy forebears who passed down a rich inheritance that we are making and remaking in our own image with ever more agency and unapologetic presence.

I have a lot of requests for my audiences—to dance, to stand, to make heat, to sing, and, ultimately, to rise and repeat after me in a proclamation of Black feminist values against state violence. Certainly, there is social pressure here, but I understand from audience reflections that they experience these moments as invitations that realign folks with their highest evolutionary destiny.

SOYICA DIGGS COLBERT Jeremy O. Harris's *Slave Play* puts pressure on conversations in Black studies and queer of color critique about repair, considering the role of theater in reparative performance. The play's reclamation of slavery's violence through a therapeutic process that requires role play troubles the distinction between working through as a psychic process and an embodied one. The play poses the question of how, if ever, one may reclaim the body in interracial intimacy and, if such a reclamation is possible, what types of power dynamics must adhere. It calls to mind, as I argue in my essay "Reconstruction, Fugitive Intimacy, and Holding History," "The Black family and the intimacies that attend it were outlawed in slavery. Intimacy always contained the threat of violence because the slave lacked any protection, physical or otherwise, in law and custom (see Hortense Spillers). For those that lived outside the law, touch constituted and unraveled the possibility of mutuality. These two sides of slavery's coin produced both the fundamental vulnerability of the Black body and the possibility for an outlawed form of intimacy."⁵ Of course, the structuring of this violence, reconstructive or not, in the context of the Broadway theater draws attention to a long history of Black violation in and through display. While the producers of the play have actively encouraged diverse audiences, the play still exists within a long history of scopoc violence that its structure invites as a prerequisite for working through.

The materiality of the body, at the heart of theatrical performance, also emerges as a pressure point in Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's *Everybody*, which features actors interchanging roles each night of the performance and thus disrupts the association of race and gender with a particular role. This method has

caused political consternation in other productions, such as when Suzan Lori-Parks's *Venus* (pre-*Hamilton*) deploys such techniques to cast historical figures. Both plays follow Harris's lead in questioning how Black playwrights may loosen the hold of histories. Their experimentation expands the modes of meaning possible for Black people within theatrical production and intensifies the pressure on Black people to be both wronged and the source of their own repair.

JAMES IJAMES First and foremost, yes, the pressure is essential and necessary. I would argue that the hallmark of the Black literary tradition is pressure. Frederick Douglass is pressure on the moral fabric. Zora Neale Hurston is pressure on the received or accepted language. James Baldwin is pressure on the way love looks. Toni Morrison is pressure on the centrality of whiteness. We push. That's what we do.

I'm thinking about my experience seeing Soho Rep's production of *Fairview*. In the play, we see a theatricalized Black family and home. Initially, this family and home are legible to us as middle class, as successful, but with secrets. As the play progresses, the family becomes less legible to us, then the Black bodies in the theater are gradually repositioned in the seat of privilege. The play chooses to upend the point of view to create a "fair view." As a Black person in this audience, I was genuinely stunned and galvanized by that moment. It broke the idea of a play and gave us a new way of experiencing theater that felt to me like radical care. The comfort and the visibility of Blackness was made central, which for the American theater is rare. I think what plays like this do is reorganize what is possible in a night of theater. Who has access? Who is this play being done for and why? The play doesn't feel the need to explain anything because



the play knows who will understand it and is speaking directly to those people. That's radical care for a Black theater audience. Nothing is required of you but your attention.

In terms of content, I think we are pressing a lot of points, to be honest. However, I think a thing that Black theater artists have to become more diligent, maybe even vigilant, about is collaborators and access to the theater. A lot of this is accomplished by encouraging institutions that produce us to adopt antiracist policies around access and hiring. In New York, there are already Black theater nights for many of the off Broadway theaters, and Jeremy O. Harris's *Slave Play* on Broadway had multiple Black theater nights and subsidized tickets for the run of the show. Jeremy made this happen at the producer level

by making his values and the values of the production the same. I think we all need to be imagining a theater that is radical both in content and execution. It matters just as much how the play gets made as what the play is about. Those things go hand in hand.

TORI SAMPSON The theater poses unique challenges because you're creating stories that are of the moment and are also timeless. You're creating stories that incorporate so much of the world but that also have to capture an audience within two and a half hours or less. You're creating stories where every character has to be vital. It's a Rubik's Cube. And it creates such a specific challenge, a beautiful challenge. There's something about trying to put all those pieces together and trying

James Ijames's
Fat Ham, the Public
Theater, New York,
2022. Photo:
Joan Marcus

to make something of the moment that will also resonate in ten or fifteen years. I think we playwrights, theater makers, get excited about that. We get excited about the restrictions and the constraints of the medium. When you do figure it all out, it's so refreshing. It's so beautiful. There's a rhythm to it like Saturday mornings in a Black household. It's like, okay, we're doing our chores this Saturday, and mom's going to play music on the stereo. Or we're getting our hair washed this Saturday. You know exactly what to do. You grab the grease; you grab the chair. It's so ritualistic. And, at the end of the day, we're all working together to get the house clean. We're all working together to get our presentation ready for church on Sunday. At the end of the day, you can see your scalp and the grease glistening from the sun.

The thing I am excited to see us give greater attention to is creating a space where Black theater artists can create Black art without having to consider the white gaze. I don't know when or if we'll ever get there. I think we've yet to see the unadulterated, unfiltered version of Black theater. It's going to be exciting when we do because that'll be a moment when we'll reach the pinnacle of what theater really is.

LISA B. THOMPSON One thing I want to push back or apply some pressure on is this trend where we talk about "theater" and really mean "New York theater." People need to be specific about what they are talking about. We need to have a much more complex and broader conversation about what's happening on stages that aren't Broadway, off Broadway, or even League of Resident Theatres (LORT) theaters. There is also work happening at Black theater companies like Crossroads in New Jersey, Penumbra in Minneapolis, Lor-

raine Hansberry Theater in San Francisco, Ebony Repertory Theater and Towne Street Theater in Los Angeles, and eta Creative Arts Foundation and Congo Square Theatre in Chicago that we need to give attention to. I am not hearing enough about what's going on in those theaters or seeing people writing about what's happening in those spaces. We're missing a lot when we don't cover them. And one of the important things that's going on is that we have African Americans who are sustaining these institutions. Giving some of our critical attention to the work being done in those spaces, some of the new plays being done in those spaces, is important.

I also would like to see more attention given to work by Black artists being done in other geographic locations. What are the prime places for developing new work by Black playwrights? I know that Austin is a huge hub for new play development, but I am not seeing it get the coverage that it deserves. I'm sure that there are other places like Austin that people are overlooking that are rich sites for new work creation and development. It's been particularly amazing for me to be able to do my work in the city where I live.

LOY A. WEBB I feel like in this era, for every area that needs pressure, there is a Black artist doing work to address it. What I found is that curators of stories pick and choose which stories they want the greater public to have access to, but the work is out there. Whether it is done in New York, Chicago, Baltimore, Philly, Kansas City, Minnesota, or Los Angeles, there are droves of artists whose names and works we don't know but we should, addressing just about everything you can think of. And I feel the issue is not the pressure point requiring greater attention, but how to find a way to allow these stories to get to



the greater public. I personally want to know them. I want to read them. I want to see their work on the stage, and I want the world to know and see them too.

KHALID YAYA LONG There is still a need for more Black queer visibility on the stage (and in critical studies). Thank you, Christina Anderson. I recently saw a production of Christina Anderson's play, *How to Catch Creation*, at the Goodman Theater in Chicago. It was such an enthralling piece of theater. Thank you, Donja R. Love. Thank you, Tarell Alvin McCraney. Thank you, Michael R. Jackson. Thank you, E. Patrick Johnson. And, yet, we need more

artists writing stories and staging plays that illuminate—and validate—the lived experiences of Black queer folk. And we need stories that are not predictable or cliché.

I would argue that this is not the sole responsibility of queer artists. Just as queer artists pen dramas that aren't solely about Black queer life and experience, we need to apply pressure on straight, cisgender artists to take up the mantle and create fully developed characters that are queer, gender nonbinary, trans-identified, and others who are socially alienated as it relates to their gender and sexuality.

Loy A. Webb's *His Shadow*, 16th Street Theatre, Berwyn, IL, 2019. Photo: Anthony Aicardi

As I was considering this query, I was on the telephone with my friend, collaborator, and deviser/choreographer MK Abadoo. She posed the following question: “Can straight people write fully formed queer characters, story lines, experiences, and outlooks of queer folk?” Embedded within MK’s question was a challenge to think beyond artistic merit and aesthetic qualities. MK’s question forced me to ponder the social responsibility of theater and performance. After a much healthy debate, we both agreed that this can happen in several ways, including collaboration, hiring dramaturgs, and, most importantly, through the practice of humility as well as embodying a radical Black queer politic. We need more stories—written by Black queer folk as well as comrades in arms—that liberate Black queer folk while also attracting and educating straight, cisgender audiences.

MARTINE KEI GREEN-ROGERS I think any area of the Black existence that is not about the era of slavery still requires greater attention. I think the legacy of slavery can still be explored (and should be), but I also think contemporary stories about love, joy, and the everyday can still find their way onstage and should be just as successful as those about our past. Also, as one who reads *a lot* of plays over the course of a year (I average, at minimum, one a day), I think we can stand to think through the ways we can tell our stories. I appreciate stories that discuss police brutality, and I think they are very useful in terms of provoking new ways for audiences to think about this issue, but I have read so many of them that are told in the exact same way—I would love to see someone do something, anything, different in terms of how this narrative is told. Play with time! Play with structure! Do something other than a linear and literal narrative!

On that idea, I also think that playwrights should continue to push against dramatic structures that do not work for the purposes of their storytelling. Black theater is in a prime place to do that as a result of the new platforms the aforementioned new moments of mainstream exposure have wrought. Being visible is the best way to tackle some of these larger issues. Especially for those in the community who have had more success—they are in a prime place to do something different and still cultivate interest in their work. We also have a legacy within the cultures and societies that we were forcibly removed from that we can tap into to reconnect with ourselves and our modes of storytelling. I also want some of these new stories to lift up the Black artists outside of just the most visible ones (actors and directors). Focus on the stage managers, dramaturgs, arts administrators, designers, and so forth. Maybe it is time for a metatheatrical play about Black artists behind the scenes?

SOYICA DIGGS COLBERT *Fairview*, *Slave Play*, and Robert O’Hara’s 2019 production of *A Raisin in the Sun* all asked how to create Black theater for majority white audiences. Black artists still have to contend with how to cater to the white gaze in order to be produced and, at the same time, disrupt whiteness as the plays suggest is their desire. While modes of distribution have enabled Black artists in other forms (i.e., film and television) to cultivate Black audiences and, arguably, shift the relationship between appearance and reception, the economics of theatrical production has yet to produce a financially viable model that also supports formal intervention and experimentation. These concerns ask for a reevaluation, as Faeda suggests earlier in the forum, of what we mean by Black theater.

III.

ISAIAH MATTHEW WOODEN *One of the things this forum has compelled me to contemplate is how much pressure figures into my own work as a scholar, critic, teacher, and theater maker. I've been reminded of the pressures I often feel to craft the kinds of sentences that will make the entire body tingle or to fill the page with the kind of prose that will capture the elegance, complexity, and utter beauty of, say, a work of art that has yet to receive its proper critical due. The classroom and rehearsal studio, of course, come with their own unique pressures. I know that I feel a particular responsibility to excite in the students and performers who join me in these spaces an unbridled passion for an art form that, even as they recognize the tremendous joy it regularly brings them, they often maintain certain doubts about, especially regarding its broader sociocultural significance or value. My immediate inclination is to want to extol the ways these bouts of pressure have propelled me and my work forward, allowing me to reach heights previously unimaginable. To do so, however, requires that I suppress or forget the many times pressure served to diminish my confidence or impede my desire and ability to create. Perhaps you might reflect on how pressure figures into your own work as a writer/thinker/creator. What do you see as some of its generative and/or productive possibilities? What are some of its limitations?*

NIA O. WITHERSPOON As a people, Black folks have been under pressure at least since we were brought here during the transatlantic slave trade, and so I am interested in my own work in creating spaces of ease and possibility, pushing against the idea that we must always be in an active or activated space in order to be in a decolonial or antiracist space. I move more toward helping us be inside a space that is *not*

pressured by colonialism, capitalism, racism, patriarchy, heterosexism—always ready to explode, or recovering from exploding. Surviving in a state of hypervigilance. I think we have arrived at a place where we are being asked to dream another way and lean into the folks who have always been working underneath what is visible (in the dark) to move and shake inside spaces of meditation, deep reflection, dream states, and psychic landscapes of self-possession. There is a lineage that is still making itself known. Ibo landing. Adrienne Kennedy. Alice Coltrane. Marie Laveau. My Aunt Ori, midwife who heals broken bones with rainwater. These are the teachers I hope we continue to look to with depth and rigor. I would like to see a much deeper engagement with a diversity of African philosophical and epistemological systems in our work and in the criticism around our work. Without it, we will never break out of our Western philosophical chains.

LOY A. WEBB For me the pressure comes with whatever is on my heart at the moment. I write from a heart place, not a head place. Thus, I have to feel emotionally connected to an issue, so much so, that the issue calls me and continues to call until I sit down to write. That's how every story I write begins. The heart compels me to put pen to paper. And I try to use my stories to put pressure on whatever issue is entrenched in my heart at the moment.

With *The Light* it was sexual assault and the devaluing of Black women and girls. With my new play, *His Shadow*, it was social protest in athletics past and present. I am a firm believer in Nina Simone's assertion that "an artist's duty is to reflect the times in which we live." In accepting that call, I tackle the issues of now and challenge myself and my audience to not end things at the problem but

Suzan-Lori
Parks's *Venus*, Yale
Repertory Theatre,
New Haven, CT,
1996. Photo: T.
Charles Erickson



to find some hope in whatever issue we are addressing. The world is a dark place already. I'm trying to bring as much light to it as possible. And, that light is how I put pressure on the issues.

JAMES IJAMES In my work, I am creating worlds, both as a playwright and as a director, where Blackness, Black queerness, Black femme is central. In a recent production of August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* that I directed, I worked with the scenic designer to create a set that greeted the audience with Blackness. We achieved this by positioning these three-foot busts of Black men, women, and children all around the stage in a shallow pool of water with a Black bottom. This literally and figuratively surrounded the production with Blackness that was both aesthetic and structural. Blackness in theater is often in some negotiation with whiteness or some trauma that is the product of white supremacy. I'm interested in a kind of Blackness that is absolutely central. A play I'm currently work-

ing on, *Fat Ham*, examines how Black families undo cycles of violence. I'm curious about how we imagine the future together, how do we imagine happiness, or pleasure or grief, which is a radical act in a theater that is used to examining our trauma and our deaths.

TORI SAMPSON It is certainly my calling to write stories for and about Black women. Black women are always going to be at the center of my narratives, and my vibration is to write plays about Black women that can be seen and consumed by the masses. As such, I sometimes feel a particular pressure to do the work necessary to get my plays about Black women onstage. The question for me becomes: How do I tell this story in a way that is true to what I want to say and how I want to say it, while also recognizing that it may eventually hit the hands of a white artistic director or dramaturg or producer who will decide whether or not it gets produced? How do I make it work without compromising my activism, without giving up my intention? I

think that's a skill that Black playwrights, especially Black women playwrights, have to develop, and it's a place where we often apply pressure on ourselves. And, I'm not saying that you have to compromise yourself artistically. It just means that you have to figure out the equation and do your best to make it right. Once you get that audience in there and you finesse it the right way, they're going to walk away with the story that you wanted to tell them, the conversation that you wanted to start.

LISA B. THOMPSON I don't know if I would say that, with my creative work, I write out of pressure. Sometimes it's sadness, other times anger; sometimes it's joy. My scholarly work arises from a form of pressure that I feel to solidify cultural legacies for contemporary artists. The creative work is escape—sometimes escaping the scholarly work that needs to be done. The scholarly work feels even more political because I'm trying to use the power of the academy, such that, if I write about a playwright or show, then it becomes a part of the record. I don't think that the scholarship is more important, but I do know how power works in this country. And I see it as my job to promote not only my work but also other people's work. My next book examines the work of contemporary Black playwrights because their work is important and should be acknowledged by the academy.

FAEDRA CHATARD CARPENTER A pressure point for me—a point of sensitivity I feel as a teacher and theater practitioner—is how to negotiate and reconcile this excitement of representation with a more sobering consideration of dramaturgical sensibilities. I find myself feeling the pressure to resist prescriptive and delimiting notions of Black theater, on one hand, while also feeling a need

to advocate for work that forges a sense of recuperation and strategic unification, on the other. As of late, efforts toward this balancing act have caused me to recall and reclaim the “For why?” question. The “For why?” takes me back to the kilns in which my professional trajectory was fired: my undergraduate days as an English major at Spelman College, and my years as an early career dramaturg at Crossroads Theater Company. (Not lost on me is that my once frequent use of “For why?” held its legibility and currency within these decidedly Black institutions, but as I worked through the ranks of doctoral study and academic positions, “For why?” was gradually—and upon reflection, erroneously—displaced by the common parlance of “So what?”)

Although akin to the “So what?” question, I have come to realize that my use of “For why?” succinctly gets to the nuanced nature of what I *really* want to understand when posing such queries. “For why?” immediately suggests a simultaneous Du Boisian inquiry into both “the what” and “the who”: What and who is the work intended *for*? In the case of work that proclaims to champion Black theater, was it actually created *for* Black people? Does its development (from the beginning to the end) activate the presence, perspectives, and participation of Black people *for* the fulfillment of Black theater meetings?

Moreover, the emphasis on *why* instead of “what” not only moves us away from interpretations of rhetorical flippancy, but it also highlights the intellectual and artistic machinations that comprise a given work. The *why* asks for a dynamic recounting, it endeavors to reveal the process-oriented reasoning behind dramaturgical choices: *Why* is a work framed in the way it is framed, or cast in the way it is cast, or performed in the way it is performed? (the list goes on)—and do these choices honor

the tenet of “for us”? Moreover, how do the answers (or lack thereof) to this “For why?” line of questioning help us practice a dramaturgy of care?

MARTINE KEI GREEN-ROGERS I am always looking for new plays to teach, new plays to work on, new artists to connect with who are doing something outside the norm for American theater storytelling. I find that having to teach certain theatrical traditions is limiting in regards to what it asks me to exclude. For example, I appreciate the Greeks and the Romans for what they did for Eurocentric theater, but considering how little of it is produced these days, the fact that most curriculums force you to spend weeks on it seems outdated and not useful. I say this as a lover of history but also as a practical human being. Teaching how we still see Greek and Roman influence in today’s theater is probably a more fruitful lesson than actually discussing these eras in great detail. This would leave more room for other forms and types of theater influenced by other countries (that tend to be ignored or the theater of an entire continent is shoved into one chapter) to be explored.

I don’t see including more works by people of color in my course as “pressure” at all, since I was doing that anyway. I enjoy working on shows by/for/about people of color and find the rooms in which there are myriad bodies and experiences to be the most rewarding and fun. If we are in the business of telling the human experience, the more (and varied) informed perspectives in the room, the better.

KHALID YAYA LONG I see myself as an interventionist. As a scholar, I aim to recover and recuperate lost, silenced, and forgotten histories. As a teacher, I aim to facilitate discussions surrounding underexamined (theater) histories, which, in turn, allows me to subvert dramatic canon(s) and decenter whiteness.

The problem, however, is that Black theater still has limited space to thrive in the academy. I don’t want to be misunderstood here: Black theater is gaining a lot of attention in a variety of ways and there’s much to celebrate. Scholars are publishing more than ever. Black playwrights are being produced at major theaters throughout the country. A number of organizations dedicated to promoting Black theater are thriving, including the Black Theatre Network, the Black Theater Association, and the August Wilson Society. And, for the sake of interdisciplinarity, we must acknowledge the range of Black films that are also being produced, thus providing wonderful opportunities for directors, actors, and writers.

But the classroom is one area where Black theater remains undervalued—if valued at all. How do we rectify this? How do we apply pressure so that Black theater no longer remains on the periphery within theater programs? Here’s what I do: I strategically center Black theater in all areas of my work. I include more Black playwrights in course syllabi than any other racial or ethnic group. In all of my classes—from “Global Drama” and “American Drama” to “Dramaturgy” and “Traditions of World Theater”—I find ways to include lectures and readings on Black feminist theater and Black queer theater. I also employ an interdisciplinary framework which allows for class discussions to consider broader social, cultural, and political issues. When it comes to season selection, I suggest Black plays or plays that can be adapted through a Black diasporic framework. It occurred to me a long time ago that, while Black folk are finding (and fighting) their way into leadership positions and roles that hold power where structural change can be implemented, the classroom remains, as bell hooks put it, “a radical space of possibility in the academy.”⁶

NOTES

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1. Raymond Jerald Pierce, "We're Going to Need a Bigger Table," *American Theatre*, February 26, 2019, <https://www.americantheatre.org/2019/02/26/were-going-to-need-a-bigger-table/>.
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