Theatre of Common Sense

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ABSTRACT

Ernie McClintock, the founder of the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech (est. 1966) in Harlem, Artistic Director of the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble (est. 1968), and the Jazz Actors Theatre in Richmond (est. 1991), preached “The Theatre of Common Sense,” later known as “Jazz Acting Technique: a Common Sense Approach to Acting”. McClintock infused self-determination and community, tenets of Black Power, in his actor training and in his productions throughout his forty-year career. This unsung hero of the American theatre became the first African American artist to pioneer a genre of actor training that challenged actors to integrate their observations of daily life in the Black communities with training in music, history, voice and movement that equipped actors to play anything from Baraka to Molière. The technique, rooted in the jazz tradition, starts with the script, or the melody. The actors create a clear character based on improvisation, or the jazz riffs. The tools of the technique allow the actors to explore, research, and respond in the context of an improvisational jazz conversation, the identifying aspect of the ensemble.

Although Ernie McClintock’s acting technique determined his versatile repertoire and shaped an innovative aesthetic, particular sects of the 1960s Harlem community viewed McClintock as a-political and his contribution is seemingly on the fringes, due to his enigmatic queer Black Power positionality. The significance of this inquiry challenges reductive understandings from scholars such as Herbert Blau who perceive the Black Power Movement and Black Arts
Movement as “ruthlessly aggressive” from “militant and existential blacks.”

However, my research on McClintock reveals a figure from the Black Arts Movement who included womanist and queer perspectives. Hence, McClintock’s training and productions demonstrate that the Black Aesthetic and alternative points of view are equally important and representative of the movement and its legacy. McClintock and his partner, Ronald Walker, created a space for the twice marginalized to connect with the African diaspora and yet provided opportunities for individual artistic expression and social justice. I propose that Ernie McClintock’s acting technique defined his versatile repertoire and shaped what I refer to as the Queer Black Power Aesthetic in acting.

In the Queer Black Power Aesthetic, which is inclusive of queer and womanist perspectives, through the Jazz Acting Technique McClintock established what he referred to as the contemporary Black Classics. This genre of plays from Amiri Baraka, N.R. Davidson, James de Jongh, and Richard Wesley are works from African American points of view that should be as familiar to practitioners and students as Shakespeare and Chekhov. Through McClintock’s efforts to create the contemporary Black Classics and acting theory, I argue his legacy persists into the 21st century in theatre professionals nationwide.

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Marc Primus refers to Ernie McClintock and Ronald Walker as “Kondaloni Sahni,” a dual hunter-god from Maldivian mythology. As I have been developing this dissertation, I have heard “Kondaloni Sahni” in my space: one half comforting me in a deep baritone voice and the other half challenging me with a host of four letter words.

Without the encouragement in the form of emails, phone calls, interviews, trips, and messages from the members of the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech, the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble, and the Jazz Actors Theatre this dissertation would not be possible. I thank them for their generosity, trust, and willingness to invite me into this extraordinary world: Sharalyn Bailey, Geno Brantley, Jerome Preston Bates, Diana Carver, Antonio Charity, Breana Clarke, Helmar Cooper, Ronlad K. Brown, Thaddeus Daniels, James de Jongh, Bolanyle Edwards, Alondra Edwards, Indira Etwaroo, J Ron Fleming, Joan Green, Traci O’Kelly, Gwendolyn Hardwick, Mary Hodges, DL Hopkins, Lola Loui, Levy Lee Simon, Al Mitchell, Donna Pendarvis, Marc Primus, Iman Shabazz, Gregory Wallace, Rose Hardman Wallace, and Sheldon Woodley. There are not enough words to express my deep gratitude for Mr. Geno Brantley’s support. Geno and Donna opened their hearts and home to me. I thank James de Jongh and Richard Wesley for providing me insight from the playwright’s perspective. We are all better off human beings because their stories are in the world.

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To my misfit crew Matthew DiCintio, Hesam Sharifian, and Tania Combs who perform the best David Garrick impression known to man. To my cohort: we
cried, we laughed, we wore pants. John Lurz, as Kenny said to Dolly, “You can’t make old friends, you either have them or you don’t.” Jennifer Smolos, Neda Namiranian Whitney, Olympia Lettry, Nicole Brandon, Billy Wheelan, Brian Healy, Dan Hantman, Ro Spaziani, Amy Klewitz, Amanda Rivera, Kendra Jones, Amanda Lying, Alison Grippo, Will McGuinness, Christine McKenna, Aimee Whelan, Aimee Rials: “… if you threw a party, invited everyone you knew, you would see the biggest gift would be from me and the card attached would say, Thank you for being a friend.” Special Thanks to Dr. Smo and Rick Joyce for feeding me and listening to me at Chez Rick. Chrissy, Gma Eva, Chariee, & CJ thank you for your laughter, prayers, compassion and love. CMF, thanks for reminding me to “make it plain.”

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From the bottom of my heart I thank my parents Stephan and Mary Ann Cizmar - Mom for driving me to my first audition when I sang “Rainbow Connection” and Papa for demonstrating the meaning of work ethic and the power of convictions. To my sisters Katherine (Sr. Buns), Natalie (Nan), and Maria (Mars): “Luck made us sisters, hearts made us friends.” To my true brothers Jason, Brian, and Jeff, thank you for all your support. My nieces and nephew who span from the Northeast to Asia: thank you to Ella, Eulalia, Amelia, Stephan, Anabel, and Julia for keeping my heart light and spirit full. And I thank Sabrina for all the things.

Dr. Monica White Ndounou in my first seminar said to the class, “I will plan your life.” I took that statement seriously. Her guidance has helped me find my voice and without her confidence in me, I am not sure if I would have made it through. Monica, thank you for taking me under your wing and supporting me in my research and in life.

Finally, I thank Ernie McClintock and Ronald Walker for speaking to me from the other side continually telling me to trust myself. They have taught me what I hope to bring to my students: bravery, self-worth, and a sense of belonging.

I dedicate this work to my mentor, teacher, and hero, the late Barbara Poitier. She made me realize that I should never settle for second best. Barbara, I hope I have made you proud.
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THEATRE OF COMMON SENSE

INTRODUCTION

In March 2015, my quest to locate Ernie McClintock’s personal archives began by compiling a list of actors from reviews in Harvard’s digital collection and online research. Through social media, I became a Facebook “stalker.” I now know that after weeks of sending instant messages to approximately twenty people, conversations ensued in a private Jazz Actors Family Facebook group including questions such as, “Who is this person? And what does she want to do with Ernie’s work?” Their suspicions were valid. I am a cisgender, white woman trained in two mainstream white western techniques: Lee Strasberg’s Method and David Mamet’s Practical Aesthetics.

During my first year at Tufts University, my initial research interest focused on the Federal Theatre Project from my post-graduate work at Hunter College. Issues of social justice, art as a means of activism, and subaltern theatre in American society have always been at the core of my scholarship. In my first year as a doctoral student in Dr. Monica White Ndounou’s African American Theatre seminar, African American Theatre and Performance married all my interests and aspirations as a scholar, actor, and teacher. To echo W.E.B. Du Bois, I realized that African American Theatre is American Theatre. Through my preparations for oral examinations on the Black Arts Movement, McClintock’s name kept coming up and he haunted me. Who was this enigmatic person? Why has no one written about him in scholarship exhaustively except only in listing productions

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and a passing footnote? I felt a connection with this mysterious teacher-director, yet could not figure out how I would find his students and if my positionality hindered my research.

Through the research, interviews, and writing process I have been consciously checking my white gaze. In my own training at the Actors Studio Drama School and Atlantic Theater Company, I considered myself a politically progressive actor when I attended protests and performed in plays that questioned the status quo and taboo subjects. However, I never considered cultural implications of acting training based in Strasberg and Mamet’s approaches. Through my research I realized that mainstream acting training is indeed a political act and part of the cultural production of primarily white storytelling and white experiences. In McClintock’s words, “Hollywood has had an enormously negative influence on good theater through its technique of capitalism.” I also considered my training and realization of my omnipresent white gaze as an entry point to Ernie McClintock’s theory and practice. I discovered that there are both differences and tangential overlaps between the Jazz Acting Technique: a Common Sense Approach and Stanislavsky-based techniques. Furthermore, as an acting teacher at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and with private students in New York City, I coach actors and teach conservatory students from varying backgrounds, ethnicities, gender identifications, countries, and experiences. Through my own teaching and scholarship, my research is an intervention from a historical, methodological, and pedagogical perspective.

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My dissertation offers an interdisciplinary study of theatre, history, politics, and acting theory as well as the intersectionality among race, class, and gender. McClintock ruptured the notion that “Black life” could only be represented in limited ways or contexts, and he demonstrated this by touring his shows from massive proscenium theatres to outdoor community performances. My work provides a historical gateway to understand the current political/artistic climate by excavating the multiple perspectives of the Black Arts Movement. By uncovering the legacy and offering an analysis of successes and failures of the movement, I am creating a potential model for future studies of acting, acting theory, and Black theatre as well as the relationship between politics and theatre.

Through the lens of what I refer to as the Queer Black Power Aesthetic, I argue that McClintock’s training and productions are rooted in two fundamental principles of Black Power, self-determination and community, and reflect the elements of a jazz ensemble. Specifically, I define the Queer Black Power Aesthetic as a construct that fosters an actor’s self-expression (self-determination) and simultaneously promotes a larger collective voice, the ensemble (community). As a result, the Queer Black Power Aesthetic champions Black Power philosophy, yet also includes womanist and queer voices, two demographics typically excluded from the Back Arts Movement context. Therefore, I am contributing to Black Arts Movement scholarship and building upon the work of Mike Sell, Annemarie Bean, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Samuel Hay, James Hatch, Franz Fanon, and Molefi Kete Asante. I will contribute to the
discourse concerning theory and practice by illuminating the work of Ernie McClintock, a lost voice in the narrative of the Black Arts Movement.

Both McClintock’s repertoire and the Jazz Acting Technique are part of the ever-evolving jazz tradition, a form that similarly establishes equal focus on the individual and the collective. McClintock identifies the technique in its fully-developed shape as “Jazz Acting Technique: a Common Sense Approach to Acting.” I argue that this definition he proposed in 1978 encapsulates the technique in all of the stages of development: “…a systematic process of character formation which requires the actor to constantly present to his audience information that will show the totality of his character, the relationship he has with all those he encounters, the specifics of place and environment and his/her relationship to it, the specifics of his objective and the character’s justification of his objective.”

Throughout the dissertation I will refer to the technique as the Common Sense technique, which is the name given by McClintock in the 1960s. Once he moved to Richmond, he identified the technique as Jazz Acting. The Jazz Acting Technique and McClintock’s repertoire include the Black Aesthetic, queer lived experiences, and womanist voices. In the jazz tradition, McClintock established an approach where these opposing viewpoints would at times battle with one another while at other moments work together in harmony.

From 1965-1991, McClintock trained actors in Harlem, and from 1991-2002, he trained Richmond-based actors. In both contexts and historical moments, he focused on honoring the lived experiences of African Americans, as opposed

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to a “one size fits all” approach that primarily circulates in conservatories and training. His Queer Black Power Aesthetic fully realized the Jazz Acting Technique in his efforts to represent multiple Black experiences in his versatile repertoire. Whereas acting techniques in the Stanislavsky system disconnects actor training, rehearsals, and performance. Hence, the development of McClintock’s technique mimics jazz itself and responds to the shifting sociopolitical contexts of a given time period and location. Both McClintock’s repertoire and the Jazz Acting Technique: a Common Sense Approach live in an ever-evolving jazz form that encourages an individual’s self-expression while responding to the needs of a given community. As a paradigm, jazz aesthetics is a collective experience in which individual musicians express their point of view within the context of an ensemble.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Ernie McClintock created the technique to train Black actors because in his estimation, Stanislavsky-based training holistically produced Black actors imitating the imitation and/or imitating white lived experiences. The students were working full time in various day jobs and many assert that they were novices to acting. These conclusions were based on commercial theatre and his own experience as a trained actor. As the company gained notoriety, actors outside the Afro-American Studio proper could audition to be in the professional company, the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble. Yet even as a director McClintock did not separate the acting class from his directorial style. Actors, such as Lola Louis, Gregory Wallace, and Jerome Preston Bates, who became part of the repertory company consider Ernie McClintock a
fundamental influence in their acting technique. In the sociopolitical context of
the 1960s and 1970s, the technique developed as a tool for self-healing to achieve
self-determination.

In the 1990s, while his pupils were educated in colleges and universities in
the Richmond area, he observed that institutions continued to train actors
primarily in the Stanislavsky tradition that neither fostered actors from their lived
experiences as African Americans nor produced plays by Black playwrights.
McClintock shifted to what Ndounou refers to as “On-the-Job-Training (OJT),”
with a specialized focus on rhythm, language, and tempo. Monica White
Ndounou defines OJT training as a method of actor training that occurs during
rehearsals, on productions, rather than in formal education or degree-granting
programs.⁵

I argue that McClintock’s techniques are just as influential as those
developed by Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and other offshoots of Stanislavsky.
The fact that he recognized that these systems did not meet the needs of Black
actors intending to portray the African American experience in the United States
makes his work a fascinating departure from popularized techniques that offers
insight into limitations of Stanislavsky-based systems. McClintock’s experience
as an actor and a spectator was what led him to such a conclusion. Furthermore,
he established an alternative method for realistic acting styles accessible to people
of color.

⁵ Monica White Ndounou, “Acting Your Color: The Power and Paradox of Acting for Black
Americans” (lecture, Center for Humanities at Tufts University, Medford, MA February 24,
2015).
The problem area I address includes the dearth of representation of the Black Arts Movement in textbooks as well as lack of acknowledgment of Jazz Acting and Black Acting Theory as a viable, relevant, and effective method for actors, directors, and educators. I am troubling current educational institutions and theatres that promote a Eurocentric aesthetic and/or acting theory. People of color’s lived experiences are not acknowledged and they are often asked to conform to a white way of approaching theatre. Not only do these techniques prove ineffective for Black actors, but can also result in either a psychological trauma related to lived experiences and/or educators ignorance in recognizing a collective ancestral past. Sociologist Ron Eyerman’s research refers to this trauma as cultural trauma: “[…] a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion […] as a reflective process, trauma links past to present through representations and imagination.”

The Queer Black Power Aesthetic framework may initially seem contradictory given the Black Power and Black Arts Movement’s association with misogyny and homophobia. Similarly, in recent scholarship from Justin A. Williams and Nicole Hodges Persley, the contradiction of empowering a community and at times marginalizing sects of a community is also prevalent in hip-hop. As Justin A. Williams states, hip-hop at its worse is “a promotion and glorification of poisonous ideas and behavior within societies (e.g. gang crime, homophobia, misogyny),” yet at its best, it is “[…] an inspirational and an

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empowering force.”⁷ As an artist and an individual, McClintock defies categorization in established ideologies and binaries, which justifies the Queer Black Power Aesthetic framework.

Methodology

While my research includes aspects of ethnography, the paradigm I have applied is more aligned with Interpretative Research. I make that distinction because within the field of ethnographic studies, the analysis is comprised of both observations and participation. Although I have gained the trust of McClintock’s students and colleagues, I have not trained or performed with them in the Jazz Acting Technique. Additionally, though McClintock expanded his student population to white actors, my research centers on his Afrocentric approach created for Black actors. Asante defines Afrocentricity as an emerging theoretical approach in American literary and dramatic criticism, which finds its origin in the African cultural context.⁸ Specifically, his technique and productions connect to an African-based culture and spirituality, which is identified as the idea that a collective past in the African diaspora traces back to African ancestry, symbology, and mysticism.⁹ Therefore, as a cisgender white female researcher, I contend that an ethnographic approach would not serve my project or privilege the experience of the actors under McClintock’s tutelage. My aim of this research

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⁹ Monica White Ndounou, “1980s Reclaiming History” (lecture, Tufts University, Medford, MA, November 8, 2012).
is decidedly to avoid overshadowing the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech and the Jazz Actors Theatre with my white positionality.

Rather, I have implemented an interpretative research model from information I gathered from the archives, personal collections, interviews, and secondary scholarship. In terms of research methods, social scientist Dvora Yanow and philosophy scholar Peregrine Schwartz-Shea’s anthology Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Return assisted in identifying my interpretative research methodology. In particular, in “Generalization in Comparative and Historical Social Science: The Difference That Interpretivism Makes, social scientist Robert Addock explains that the scholar conducts her inquiry/exploration from an experience-near perceptive. Yanow and Schwartz-Shea specify that the researcher does not begin her inquiry with concepts established a priori. In my own experience of researching McClintock, concepts therefore emerged from encounters with his students, their personal collections, and the archives. Rather, through this near-experience investigation, my analysis and theoretical framework emerged from encounters with his students, their personal collections, archived material, and scholarship.

The method of interviewing took differing forms in varying contexts, including email, phone calls, Skype, text messages, social media, and direct encounters in public spaces and homes. Although each interview was allotted an hour of time, they typically lasted two to four hours. For example, in Atlanta, Al

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Suavae Mitchell and I met at a local library where he shared photographs and newspaper clippings. In New Rochelle, in Joan Green’s living room, she bequeathed four pieces of her personal archive for my own collection. These items included a poster of Before It Hits Home, two photographs from the production of From the Mississippi Delta, and an original pamphlet from the Afro-American Studio from Acting & Speech’s 1971 course offerings. Joan Green continues to digitally send me images from her archive. These examples in a quiet library and a serene home provided intimate and personal dialogue that unearthed memories and stories buried deep in Mitchell and Green’s memory.

In Richmond, I had the opportunity to interview the eight members of the Jazz Actors Family in the Geno Brantley and Donna Pendarvis’s home in the summer of 2015 and witnessed Jazz Actors in a live, familial setting. The impersonations of McClintock and Ronald Walker, reconfiguring memories from productions and the rehearsal process intertwined with personal stories from the company reflected a jazz ensemble. The conversation flowed and shifted from politics, issues of representation, and specifics of the technique, bookended by a Buddhist prayer surrounding McClintock and Walker’s ashes before an altar. Adjacent to the altar sat a large photograph of McClintock peering over his smudged-stained glasses. Through these interviews and follow-up phone calls and emails, I pieced together theory, practice, and repertoire of the Afro-American Studio for Acing & Speech and Jazz Actors Theatre.

In my archival research, my findings revealed that McClintock’s legacy is not housed in one institution and more importantly his personal archives still
reside in Geno Brantley and Donna Pendarvis’ basement. However, there are select archives that document the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech and the Jazz Actors Theatre. The Schomburg Center for Black Culture’s folder on the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech yielded a scant handful of newspaper clippings. As far as historical record is concerned, I discovered the Errol Hill Collection at Dartmouth College contains a healthy folder of reviews, correspondences, playbills, and images. Notably, Hill and McClintock corresponded in letters in which the scholar was interested in acquiring more concrete material on his practice. I pieced together memories, personal collections, and the existing archives to shape my dissertation.

My persistence and ongoing conversations with the actors from the Afro-American Studio of Acting & Speech and the Jazz Actors Theatre has resulted in a kinship I feel with the actors as well as Ernie McClintock and Ronald Walker. I worked to gain trust of McClintock’s students and collaborators, and am committed to bringing McClintock’s work into conversation with current scholarship. I believe the inclusion of him in the narrative of the Black Arts Movement and his contribution to acting theory will contribute to the work of scholars, actors, and teachers. I am fortunate to establish relationships with the Jazz Actors and the elder generation from the 1960s and 1970s. Hence, the highlight of my research has been the opportunity to interview actors who are part of a family, a lineage that spans four decades.

Another revelatory moment in my research occurred in the writing process. Under the mentorship of Professor Ndounou, I realized that I was still
entrenched in the product of my own training in terms of separating technique from performance. In constructing the dissertation, I defaulted to technique and productions. However, McClintock has innovated theatre practice and training by finding an approach that creates fluidity between rehearsal and performance. I consider my dissertation the first step in a more exhaustive study of the technique and productions.

When I began my research, the certainty of an Ernie McClintock archive seemed aspirational and proved to be a challenge in the process. As I learned in Research Methods in my first year of doctoral studies, one should never search for the white elephant. After pursuing the actors, Donna Pendarvis, Stage Manager and wife of Geno Brantley, organized the group interview with the Jazz Actors in Richmond. In August 2015 in emails from Pendarvis had suggested that perhaps Brantley walk me down the basement steps where McClintock and Walker’s personal papers and ephemera are un-catalogued, risking their perpetuity. Even though Brantley decided not to usher me into the basement, the group interview with the actors was a profound and eye-opening experience. Additionally, Brantley generously shared with me select materials and allowed me to photograph certain items including posters, of a plethora of Walker’s artwork and images such as McClintock and Tupac Shakur, who mentored the artist in his teenage years. Throughout the process, I continually collated and transcribed interviews, items from personal collections, and conducted follow-up interviews and discussions along with the materials from the Errol Hill papers, Harvard’s
digital archives, and a smattering of materials housed at the Schomburg and Atlanta University Center’s Archives Research Center.

A challenge that haunted me throughout the process primarily became the reconciliation between the problematic positionality of Amiri Baraka’s hypermasculine approach and McClintock’s inclusive philosophy. In Baraka’s earlier work in the 1960s and 1970s, his writing revealed homophobic and misogynist rhetoric, which later in his life and career he denounced. Furthermore, when I presented a paper on McClintock at the 2016 Comparative Drama Conference, one gentleman who knew the teacher/director said with conviction, “Ernie didn’t like Baraka.” To that end, in a 1973 interview preserved in the Robert Woodruff Library at Atlanta University Center, McClintock refutes the claim that Baraka influenced his work.\(^{11}\) I address this contradiction by understanding Baraka’s work as a product of the Black Arts Movement and McClintock’s propensity for challenging and robust texts. Ultimately, Baraka’s call for justice and equal rights spoke to McClintock’s students because they encounter racism and discrimination in their lived experiences.

Schools of Thought

Building upon Molefi Asante’s notion of metatheory, or “a product of a decision rather than discovery,” I have chosen to engage my research in conversation with other Black acting methods as opposed to a primary focus on

\(^{11}\) Ernie McClintock, interview by Robert Wilson, June 13, 1973. Countee-Cullen Harold Jackman Memorial Collection, Archives Research Center, Atlanta University Center.
Stanislavsky’s approach.\textsuperscript{12} Asante describes metatheory or paradigm as “a conception that includes a multiplicity of theories; as such, it allows us to develop better interpretations, fuller understandings and more effective articulation in the meaning of human goals and interactions.”\textsuperscript{13} However, to engage in a broader scope of contemporary acting theory and my actor training, I have identified moments of overlap within the dissertation. The schools of thought that influenced my research and Queer Black Power Aesthetic lens is based in current and past scholarship in Black Acting Methods, the Black Aesthetic, Womanism, and Queer Theory.

**Black Acting Methods**

McClintock’s primacy on actor training, as opposed to a perfected and repeatable performance, and unearthing the Black actor’s authentic self echoes Alain Locke’s work from the Harlem Renaissance. The synergy between McClintock and Locke’s theories connects in their emphasis on the actor and primacy of self-expression. In other words, as Locke advocated in “The Negro and the American Theatre” (1927), “A race of actors can revolutionize the drama quite as definitely and perhaps more vitally than a coterie of dramatists.”\textsuperscript{14}

Furthermore, the development of the actor versus the churning out an oeuvre of plays and poetry is what distinguishes McClintock from the work of poet/activist/dramatist Amiri Baraka in for example “The Revolutionary Theatre”


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

(1963), which uses language as a weapon against the incumbent hegemony: “This
is a theatre of assault, The play will split the heavens for us will be called THE
DESTRUCTION OF AMERICA.” Baraka identified with the work of W.E.B. Du
Bois in terms of using the theatre as a site of protest and reverse “double
consciousness […] this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of
the others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world, that looks on in
amused and pity. One ever feels his two-ness- an American, a Negro; two souls,
two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body,
whose dogged strength alone keeps I from being torn asunder.” McClintock
aligns with the notion of the Black actors freeing themselves from this double
consciousness, but his approach alludes to Locke’s advocacy of self-expression.

During Locke’s historical moment, Locke and W.E.B Du Bois debated
over the notion that the aim of Black Arts should be rooted in propaganda. From
Locke’s point of view in his essay “Art or Propaganda” (1926), “propaganda
perpetuates the position of group inferiority even in crying out against it.”
Although I propose that McClintock started with self-expression, his technique
developed into Jazz Acting and follows the principles of the jazz aesthetic. Within
this framework, in The Poetry and Poetics of Amiri Baraka: The Jazz Aesthetic
(1985) William J. Harris articulates the jazz aesthetic is “a procedure that uses
jazz variations as paradigms for the conversions of white poetic and social ideas

15 Notably, in 1965 Leroi Jones changed his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka to identify with his
18 Alain Locke, “Art or Propaganda?,” in Call and Response, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and
into black ones.” Therefore, jazz is a subversion of white cultural norms. Before achieving the sophistication of jazz riffing, the white gaze must be eliminated to find authentic self-expression: “Art in the best sense is rooted in self-expression and whether naïve or sophisticated is self-contained.” The notion of “self-contained” speaks to McClintock’s establishment of his studio in Harlem recruiting actors of African descent.

A separatist approach in the actor training during the Black Arts Movement addresses sociologist Ron Eyerman’s question regarding the effects of cultural trauma: “How is the past to be represented in the present, to individuals, and more importantly in this context, to and for a collective?” Eyerman proposed that cultural trauma in African American communities posits “[the] memory of slavery has been tinged with some strategic, practical, and political interest by the hegemony,” which “can lead to a distorted identity-formation.”

As illuminated by scholar Ndounou, actors trained in primarily Stanislavsky-based systems can lead to a perpetuation of that culture trauma and distortion of identity formation. The theatre is a space of identity formation through imagination and representation that “links past to present.” For McClintock, he responded to the needs of his communities by establishing a studio subverting

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20 Ibid.
22 Ibid, 2.
23 Monica White Ndounou, “Acting Your Color: The Power and Paradox of Acting for Black Americans” (lecture, Center for Humanities at Tufts University, Medford, MA February 24, 2015).
such practices in the western acting tradition that can lead to distortions of African American identities.

To that end, an Afrocentric lens is critical to Jazz Acting’s development of scripted and unscripted work as well as in the context of existing Black acting theorists and practitioners. Molefi Asante’s *The Afrocentric Idea* (1984) aims to remedy cultural trauma by “placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior.” Both Asante’s research and Carlton W. and Barbara J. Molette’s *Black Theater: Premise and Presentation* (1986) center on an Afrocentric worldview that resists Eyerman’s identification of hegemonic practices in American society. Furthermore Carlton W. Molette and Barbara J. Molette, both theatre practitioners and scholars, explore the foundation of Afrocentricity in the theatre because “since art grows out of a culture and reflects and perpetuates the values of the culture from which it emerges, the values of art are inextricably connected to the cultural identifies of the creators of the art.” The Jazz Acting Technique supports Carlton W. Molette and Barbara J. Molette's estimation that within the Afrocentric vantage point, “The human being, acting with person power, can animate, activate, and galvanize the material or the spiritual.” McClintock’s contribution to acting theory highlights the actor as a critical creator of art and his technique offers an approach that is applicable across genres: classical, contemporary, and devised.

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27 Ibid.
As far as broader conversation in Black acting theory scholarship is concerned, McClintock’s actor training subverts Eurocentric perspectives and paradoxically echoes aspects of traditional western approaches. Therefore, McClintock’s acting theory creates tension with Stanislavsky-based approaches and will add to the rising discourse in Black acting theory in the African American Theatre and Performance Studies. For example, Monica White Ndounou’s synthesis of theory and practice explored in “Encountering Black Culture in Acting Classrooms and Beyond” (2009) emphasizes “Afrocentric worldviews without privileging them as the only way of teaching or learning acting.”

Ndounou’s inclusive acting pedagogy integrates Afrocentric cultural practices and traditions “alongside Western acting methodologies in the American theatre.”

McClintock’s technique and Ndounou’s approach are both grounded in the notion of Afrocentricity that fosters the autonomy of the individual actor in the context of an ensemble. In terms of the Lockean precept of the individual artist’s self-expression, Ndounou uses “ideologies of resistance and empowerment to teach actor, agency, which refers o the actor’s capacity of exerting power.” Simultaneously, a “sense of community is maintained through a series of ‘call and response’- influenced activities.”

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29 Ibid.
Acting Technique is call and response among the community. In terms of McClintock’s relationship to the concept of community, the term has particular iterations. The familial community relates to the elders of the Afro-American Studio of Acting & Speech mentoring the Jazz Actors Theatre students; the local community is the relationships among the productions, the geographical locations, the surrounding inhabitants, and the resident institutions; the ensemble community consists of the actors on the stage. Moreover, within the Afrocentric worldview, the context of live performance call and response acknowledges the collective experience of the participants onstage and in the audience.

With regards to the McClintock’s actors as a familial community and Ndounou’s model of an ensemble classroom dynamic, “Afrocentric concepts of community are an effective way to encourage ensemble acting. [...] Ensemble acting refers to a unified approach to acting that emphasizes the collective performance of the group, rather than focusing exclusively on individual performances.” In particular, Ndounou incorporates the teachings of Stella Adler’s Stanislavsky-based technique and Barbara Ann Teer Afrocentric method in ensemble acting. Therefore, Ndounou’s classroom structure engages with McClintock’s acting technique. McClintock’s pedagogical foundation began when he studied with Helen Espie in Chicago and through his exploration of jazz, the technique developed into the Jazz Acting Technique: a Common Sense

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31 In Ndounou’s approach some of these activities include questionnaires, weekly e-mails and journal entries. See: Monica White Ndounou, “Encountering Black Culture in Acting Classrooms and Beyond,” *Theatre Topics*, 19 no. 1 (March 2009), doi: 10.1353/tt.0.0056.
Approach. Additionally, Ndounou and McClintock, both trained actors, recognize
the limitations of iterations of a Stanislavsky approach for people of color.

Conversely, in Sharrell Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer’s *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* (2016), Luckett’s essay decidedly exclude white western traditions and Afrocentric methods come to the fore, “so that they may have autonomy over their images, dialogue, and representing”33 In a conference at Bucknell University in 2017, Luckett discussed her article on the “Henricks Method” in which she refuted comparisons or efforts to align the Henricks Method with western storytelling and techniques. Her research and practice of the Henricks Method lives in the separatist tradition and objects to dialoguing with western techniques.34 Whereas McClintock’s Jazz Acting addresses both scripted work from writers in the western cannon such as Peter Schaffer’s *Equus* (1973) and devised theatrical events in Harlem and Richmond. Hence, McClintock’s productions and technique vacillate between binaries, in this instance between traditional approaches and self-authored work but consistently through an Afrocentric viewpoint.

In current research on Black Acting, my exploration of McClintock’s acting theory in conjunction with Luckett and Ndounou’s research is in conversation with Shonni Enelow’s *Method Acting and Its Discontents on American Psycho-Drama* (2015), which purports that acting techniques (whether

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34 Sharrell Luckett, “Black Acting Methods and Activism” (Panel Session VI, African Arts: Activism & Aesthetics Conference, Griot Institute for Africana Studies, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA October 1, 2016).
training) necessarily lack neutrality and/or objectivity. To that end, Stanislavsky-based approaches including Strasberg’s Method and David Mamet’s Practical Aesthetics are default techniques and institutionally the baseline approach for actors of all creeds, colors, and gender identification. However, as Ndounou argues “White is also a race. It’s made up of a lot of different ethnicities and [students and practitioners] must understand the history of whiteness.”

The scope of this dissertation does not explore the history of whiteness due to my focus on Afrocentricity. However, it is critical for the reader to understand this context of whiteness and lack of neutrality. As Enelow suggests, “all methods have histories, are connected to cultural practices, and depend on axiomatic ideologies. The technical aspects of acting are even more directly linked to their histories and ideologies than those of other art forms.” In Enelow’s book, she cites James Baldwin’s experience at the Actors Studio that much like McClintock recognized “the central problem with American theater was its ‘ineptitude at handling the real lives of Blacks.’” There are indeed similarities with Stanislavsky-based systems in terms of actors aiming to identify with the characters they are portraying: “Identification is not just theatrical: it is the mechanism of a specific kind of modernist acting.” Although there is a common thread of accessing a universal human experience, in Enelow’s analysis of Baldwin’s experience of the Actors Studio “racism cannot be overcome merely by

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37 Ibid, 74.
38 Ibid, 20.
acknowledging our shared humanity.”\textsuperscript{39} Therefore, I urge the reader to resist temptations to equate McClintock’s training as an iteration of Stanislavsky’s problematic, albeit influential, theory.

Part of the Afrocentric lens in relationship to McClintock’s acting theory necessitates the framework of jazz aesthetics exhaustively explored in scholarship as well as its influence on current performance practices. In particular, the founders of the Austin Project (tAP) including Omi Osun L. Jones, Lisa L. Moore, and Sharon Bridgforth continue to chronicle the practical application of jazz aesthetics in the process of creating theatre and performance. Although \textit{Experiments in Jazz Aesthetics: Art, Activism, Academia, and the Austin Project} (2010) connects with Harris’s case-study on Amiri Baraka and McClintock’s Jazz Acting Technique, it distinguishes its jazz acting iteration in female creative energy. However, their work also engages with Baraka and McClintock in their assertion that the jazz aesthetic “is about revolution/the revolution of spirit […] used for the purpose of building, nurturing, extending, and celebrating the humanity, liberation, and dignity of all people globally […] and] asserts that the \textit{process} of creating art is as important as the outcome.”\textsuperscript{40} The process of creating art for jazz actors continues from performance to performance or as Asante contends “[i]n oratory, as in music, the individualistic, the improvisation, is the soul of performance.” The emphasis on process and in particular reacting “in the moment in the manner” in performance echoes jazz musicians riff in live

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 89.
performance. Certainly, there are multiple subgenres in jazz acting with presumably additional intersections outside the scope of this dissertation and will be pursued in my future research.

In addition to process, a common thread in jazz aesthetics in acting technique emphasizes a particular use of language and rhythm. In terms of language and rhythm originating in Asante’s analyses, Molette and Molette ascertain that the Eurocentric perspective sees spirituality as an illusion within Afrocentric theatre. They define the Eurocentric worldview, “[h]olds that the material, the experimental, is real and the spiritual is an illusion.”\(^{41}\) In the theatre, the Eurocentric worldview follows the traditional narrative that posits the birth of theatre emanated from the ancient Greece put forth by Aristotle’s *The Poetics*.\(^{42}\) In Afrocentric Theatre “[t]here can be no separation between material and spiritual, profane and sacred, form and substance…”\(^{43}\) Furthermore, Asante understands rhythm as the core of African American transcendence to the spiritual realm.\(^{44}\) The rhythm is discovered through the act of speaking, which echoes the orality in Afrocentric storytelling: “Language itself compounds the problems of the unknown, for it is being made as the speaker speaks.”\(^{45}\) However, Afrocentric approaches do not suggest that every actor’s process of discovering and/or accessing rhythm in performance is monolithic. For example, in a 1960 interview with *Sullen Art*, William J. Harris chronicles Baraka’s discovery of his own rhythm and language in poetry, inspired by modernist poet William Carlos

\(^{41}\) Molette and Molette, *Black Theatre: Premise and Presentation* 17.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.

\(^{44}\) Asante, *Afrocentric Idea Revised*, 49.

\(^{45}\) Ibid, 46.
Williams: “[I] learned from [Williams] mostly how to write in my own language-how to write the way I speak rather than the way I think a poem ought to be written…in my own speech, utilizing the rhythms of speech rather than any metrical concept. To talk verse. Spoken verse.”

In Sharon Bridgforth’s assessment of rhythm and language in “Finding Voice,” a core ingredient in the creating process includes polyrhythms. “In my experience, this aesthetic fits in the world that women of color, queer women, and white women that have done rigorous work on dismantling their racism. […] Writers do the work of opening themselves, of going in deep, articulating, and returning. The writer’s job is to feel.”

The scope of this dissertation does not exhaustively cover the similarities and differences of multiple jazz acting approaches, but there are critical aspects from tAP and Baraka such as process, rhythm, and language that correlate with McClintock’s contribution to jazz acting theory.

In terms of the influence of jazz aesthetics, which grounds McClintock’s theory and productions, scholar/actor/director Nicole Hodges Persley engages with hip-hop theater and performance whereby in theory and practice McClintock’s work intersects. In addition to his direct connection with hip-hop when considering his influence on the late Tupac Shakur, his training and productions mirror Persley’s assessment of the relationship between the artists, the audiences, and their sociopolitical context: “hip-hop theater artists have a connection, both profound and superficial, to hip-hop’s capacity to connect diverse racial and ethnic audiences who identify with Hip Hop as a space to resist

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46 Harris, The Poetry & Poetics of Amiri Baraka: The Jazz Aesthetic, 57.
the status quo and to re-imagine racial, social, and cultural identifications.”

McClintock created space in his theatre for hip-hop devised work where
performers subverted white mainstream theatrical institutions, but not without
contradictory and/or controversial modes of performance.

Discord and friction are elements of the jazz aesthetic framework, where
at times performers among each other or with the audiences will battle, while at
other moments they will be in synchronicity. However, dissonant moments are a
defining attribute of jazz in all its permutations. As Mike Sell situates the Black
Arts Movement in current and future studies in Avant-Garde Performance and the
Limits of Criticism (2008), “The ‘soul power’ of this movement demands real
subtlety and persistence on the part of the critic and scholar.”

This project aims to contribute to this discourse by integrating a third component to Sell’s
assessment, the actor. Essentially, akin to hip-hop, the Jazz Acting Technique is
an ever-evolving dialogue and performance tradition between performers and
their audiences.

The Black Aesthetic

Asante’s Afrocentric lens is a useful framework to locate the 1960s Black
Aesthetic, whose principles are critical in McClintock’s primacy on community,
self-determination, and subverting Stanislavsky-based acting methods. In this
context, Malcolm X defined self-determination in 1968: “We assert that we have
the right to direct and control our lives, our history and future rather than have our

49 Mike Sell, “Blackness as Critical Practice,” in Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of
destinies determined by American racists.” In the 1960s, revolution became a means of asserting self-determination. Ron Karenga, one of the influential scholar/activists who established pan-Africanist and Black Nationalist discourse, states in “Black Cultural Nationalism” (1968), the ingredients to “make it revolutionary. In brief, be functional, collective and committing.” McClintock’s pedagogy alludes to these three qualities of the Black Aesthetic repeated by scholars such as Larry Neal in “The Black Arts Movement” (1968). Furthermore, McClintock’s technique, which fosters self-determination in his actors, answers Neal’s call for Black Arts and the Black Power philosophy and how both concepts “relate broadly to the Afro-American’s desire for self-determination and nationhood.”

Amiri Baraka’s *The Revolutionary Theatre*, published in 1965, foregrounds the aesthetic and connects the tangible action of rallying artists of African descent, yet also connection to a cultural, spiritual, and historical dimension. McClintock supports Neal’s assertion that “[c]ulture is the basis of all ideas, images and actions. To move is to move culturally, i.e. by a set of values given to you by your culture. Without culture Negroes are only a set of reactions to white people.” He remarks, “The Revolutionary Theatre must take dreams and give them a reality. It must isolate the ritual and historical cycles of reality. But it must be food for those who need food, and daring propaganda for the

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beauty of the Human Mind.” His reference to ritual and historical cycles, or the African Continuum, aligns with McClintock’s technique and repertoire. Ndounou articulates the African Continuum: “the history and sequence of events across the African diaspora that connect the African ancestors to living descendants.” Within McClintock’s theatre, the actor progresses the African Continuum through their ancestral body, which as Harvey Young proposes, “represents, re-presents, the bodies and the embodied experience of her ancestors whose previous actions invoked her current presence.” McClintock recognized that Black bodies both share an ancestral past yet have individual and varying life experiences. Young defines this dual presence, or Critical Memory, acknowledges that those of African ancestry may not have the same memories, but there is an experiential overlap.

The call to create a Black Theatre from a collective and disciplined approach certainly aligns with McClintock, yet there are also nuanced differences where the teacher and director adapted revolution in his own terms. In particular, Baraka’s emphasis W.E.B. Du Bois’s prescription that “All Art is propaganda and ever must be” diverges from McClintock’s primacy on self-expression. Moreover, another distinction from the Black Aesthetic is the notion of subverting versus destroying, “the white thing.” Neal famously quotes Don L. Lee to illustrate a need for a new, separate Black Arts in which “[w]e must destroy Faulkner, dick,

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57 Ibid.
jane [sic], and other perpetuators of evil. It’s time for Du Bois, Nat Turner, and Kwame Nkrumah. As Frantz Fanon points out: destroy the culture and you destroy the people.”

McClintock concurs with the need to establish a Black acting technique separate from the western status quo, but his aim of emphasized healing for his people as opposed to “a weapon to help in the slaughter of these dimwitted fat-bellied white guys who somehow believe the rest of the world is here for them to slobber on.” Additionally, McClintock supports the Black Aesthetic in terms of “writers re-evaluating western aesthetics, the traditional role of the writer, and the social function of art.” However, within McClintock’s reevaluation of art, he privileges the actor’s role in creating scripted and unscripted theatrical events. Moreover, the ways in which the jazz aesthetic links with Karenga’s manifesto is in the process, or as Ron Karenga stared, “It is the business of making revolution.”

**Womanism**

Scholars and artists who opposed the criteria and practices associated with Baraka, Neal, and Karenga’s Black Aesthetic philosophy acknowledge that within the Afrocentric lens, there are multiple aesthetics such as womanism. As Julian Mayfield argued in “You touch my Black Aesthetic and I’ll Touch Yours” (1971), “each of us has his own images, for which we must not seek little neat

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60 Jones/Baraka, “The Revolutionary Theatre,” 2.  
This idea highlights McClintock’s paradoxical relationship with the Black Aesthetic, womanism, and Queer theory depending on the actors on stage, the material they performed, and sociopolitical context. Moreover, as the jazz aesthetic articulates, sometimes these perspectives are at odds with one another in the same performative moment. Related to contradictions, McClintock’s Jazz Acting Technique is at odds with Mayfield when he refutes music as part of the Black Aesthetic in which he proclaims: “I no longer believe that the gift of music has much to do with the Black Aesthetic. [...] can so easily be chewed up, digested, and spat out by this vigorous sick society.” Although in this remark, Mayfield makes a significant argument in regards to cultural appropriation of Black culture by the mainstream, McClintock and Asante cite music, and in particular rhythm, as an integral aspect of African American experiences. However, as Mayfield notes “Soul music alone does not a black man make.” Additionally, Mayfield and his contemporaries repeatedly use the word “man” to represent all people, which puts forth a phallocentric Black Aesthetic that excludes Black women and their experiences.

Prior to “Alice Walker, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, and Clentora Hudson-Weems...laying the foundation [of womanism] and speaking in three different voices that harmonize and coordinate so well,” the writings of Black female voices from Nikki Giovanni and Barbara Smith criticized the Black

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64 Ibid.
Aesthetic.\textsuperscript{65} Nikki Giovanni’s “Black Poems, Poseurs, and Power” (1969) echoes Mayfield’s sentiments that “There is a tendency to look at Black experience too narrowly.” Giovanni further rejects a symbiosis between the Black Aesthetic’s revolutionary theatre: “The latent militarism of the artistic community is even more despicable – art and militarism have always been traditionally opposed.”\textsuperscript{66} However, within McClintock’s theatre, he produced many of Baraka’s plays, as a part of the theatre of assault along side womanist perspectives. In a nuanced perspective, Barbara Smith’s “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism” (1977) identifies the distinction of works authored by womanists, Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Walker, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker: “The use of Black women’s language and cultural experience in books by Black women about Black women results in a miraculously rich coalescing of form and content and also takes their writing far beyond the confines of white/male literary structures.”\textsuperscript{67}

Fundamentally, Alice Walker’s writing opens up a consideration of women as “invisible. Rejected. Overlooked” in \textit{Coming Apart} (1979) and subverts the monolithic shortcomings of Black Power and the Black Arts Movement. Walker acknowledges the multiplicity of experiences in womanism as well as the overlap:

\begin{quote}
I have, as well as all have, shared a part of my life- since the day I was born- with men those whose concept of woman is degraded on. I have also experiences, like the woman in this piece, Fort-second Street; I felt
\end{quote}

demeaned by the selling of bodies, threatened by violence, and furious that my daughter must grow up in a society in which the debasement of women is actually enjoyed.”

McClintock provided the womanist artists with a platform, especially when considering the Afrocentricity’s emphasis on healing. As Layli Philips articulates in *The Womanist Reader* (2006), “…problem solving in everyday spaces […] restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension.” Much like McClintock’s productions and Philips’ assessment of womanist methods, they work through “everyday activities.” However, the project of McClintock’s technique and Queer Black Power Aesthetic provided space for womanist perspectives outside his ontological experience.

As a cisgender man, McClintock’s participation in womanism is best understood as how Michael Awkward situates his own positionality in “A Black Man’s Place in Black Feminist Criticism.” Awkward evokes the words of novelist Toni Morrison in framing his own positionality in “men’s participation as ‘comrades.’” However, Awkward contradicts the very notion of comrades when he states “[…] while gendered difference might be said to complicate the prospect of non-phallocentric black feminism, it does not render such a project impossible.” By providing space for Black women to speak from their diverse backgrounds in devised work selected by, performed by, and about Black women

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70 Ibid, xxvvi.
72 Ibid.
harkens to Smith’s call in 1977. McClintock’s acting technique and productions relate to Awkward’s plea to decenter phallocentricty. In practice, McClintock’s theatre producing and supporting womanist works in his career and allowing for Black female agency relate to Awkward’s analysis of his own writing. “The writing self as biologically male is to emphasis the desire not to be ideologically male; it is to explore the process of rejecting phallocentric perspectives by men which men traditionally have justified the subjugation of women.”

**Queer Theory**

The Black Aesthetic and the notion of Black authenticity, which presumes Mayfield’s “neat little definitions” excludes not only womanism, but also McClintock’s queer positionality. E. Patrick Johnson *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and Politics of Authenticity* argues that “Black Americans employing the rhetoric of black authenticity, the outcome has often been a political agenda that has excluded more voices than it has included.”

Queer theory emerged from post-structuralist critical theory to include voices beyond the “gay” or “lesbian” identifications and as Judith Butler notes, “queer” is a constructed linguistic practice:

> Queer derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult. This is an invocation by which a social bond among homophobic communities is formed through time. The interpellation echoes past interpellations, and binds the speakers, as if they spoke in unison across

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73 Ibid, 69.
McClintock defies neat categories, which echoes Butler’s argument regarding the limitations of reclaiming a terms that were initially used to shame those outside the heteronormative and gender binary. She contends, “[t]o recast queer agency in this chain of historicity is thus to avow a set of constraints on the past and the future that mark at once the limits of agency and its most enbling conditions.”

Therefore the term Queer Black Power seems paradoxical, because by definition both these terms Queer and Black Power as binaries limit intersectionality.

In addition to the linguistic constraints of “Queer,” it is a “predominantly white movement and fails to play within non-white communities,” especially when considering McClintock’s historical context. As such, Black queer positionality is also troubled in McClintock’s sociopolitical moment. Scholars E. Patrick Johnson and Marc Anthony Neal locate this friction of Queer and Black in the context of McClintock’s lifetime. In Neal’s chapter “Fear of a Queer Soul Man: The Legacy of Luther Vandross,” he argues that the Black Power era, “when hyperblack, hypermasculine, hypersexual male icons seemed logical retorts to ongoing ideological threats centered on notions of American masculinity.” McClintock as a leading figure of the Black Arts Movement and an unapologetic gay Black man therefore disrupts, and perhaps even threatens, the hypermasculine ideology in Harlem.

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76 Ibid, 170.
77 Ibid.
Not only does McClintock’s Black queer positionality upset notions of Black masculinity, but his repertoire and technique in the 20th century exposes what Johnson calls the paradox of Black authenticity linked to masculinity and therefore patriarchal signification. Johnson hypothesizes that the “ironic and paradoxical manifestation of these oppressions (sexism, heterosexism, homophobia) enacted by black heterosexual men, however, might reveal the slippage between the mask of black masculinity as always already heterosexual and the unacknowledged desire for the homosexual.” McClintock did not overtly support the idea of an unknown desire form those that opposed him, but his positionality highlights the shortcomings of heteronormative and hypermasculine ideology often associated with the Black Arts Movement.

For McClintock, the theatre, whether his productions were mounted in a proscenium theatre, an art gallery, or on the streets of Harlem, within the Queer Black Power Aesthetic, he included multiple perspectives that flourished in different performance contexts. Much like Luther Vandross, he can be read “against the dominant black male soul of the era.” However, analysis refutes Neal’s assertion that to consider McClintock in the queer frame that it is “critical to contextualizing Vandross’s ‘queerness’ in the early 1980s is to read him against the dominant black male soul singers of the era.” Neal goes on to say that “Hip-hops goliath of masculinity had been slain by a disease presumably preserved for

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80 Ibid.
82 Ibid, 153.
‘ punks, fags, and queens.’” Yet Justin A. Williams and Hodges Persley argue for the merits and empowerment hip-hop affords while acknowledging the problematic facets of the genre. Due to the AIDS epidemic, discrimination against Black gay men became more oppressive and violent, as explored by both Neal and Johnson. Undoubtedly, the epidemic affected McClintock’s personal and professional career. However, he also absorbed many of the tenets of the Black Power movement, the same movement that excluded queer voices. Indeed the presence of the Black Aesthetic, womanism, and queer voices were at times at odds with one another. But that is the crux of Jazz Acting, polyphony, harmony, and battles. In summation, as Johnson articulated, the “wonderful thing about performance, however, is the space provides possibilities and transgressions.”

Chapter Outline

In Chapter One, “Defining Ourselves: Healing through Jazz Technique in Training and Performance,” I situate Ernie McClintock in his historical moment and argue that the political, social, and theatrical context of the 1960s and 1970s fueled McClintock’s impetus to establish Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech. The political and historical contexts encompassing civil unrest, protests, and demands for equality propelled Black Power ideology in the Afrocentric worldview, contextualized the theoretical foundation of his technique and Afrocentric worldview. Through his experience as an actor, his training with Helen Espie in Chicago and Lou Gossett in New York, he was compelled to

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83 Ibid, 159.
84 Johnson, Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity, 74.
establish a school and subsequently a professional theatre company that served the needs of his Black community. His community included even those African Americans on the fringes of their own neighborhoods including criminals, queer folks, and dark-skinned actors. The Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech served as a temple of healing for the ostracized. McClintock integrated a disciplined curriculum where classes included Black History, acting, music, and dance. The courses were essential to the curriculum because they promoted self-determination and community building, two essential components in the Black Power Movement.

Chapter Two, “‘On-The-Job-Training’: Common Sense Acting in Richmond” chronicles Ernie McClintock’s pilgrimage to Richmond where he developed his technique and founded the Jazz Actors Theatre in the capital of the confederacy. In the historical moment of the 1980s and 1990s, with the onset of the AIDS epidemic and solidification of Reaganomics, McClintock’s commitment to resisting mainstream theatre, building community, and promoting an Afrocentric worldview made a lasting impression Richmond’s theatrical landscape. In this chapter, I investigate how McClintock’s Jazz Acting is reflective of a Jazz Aesthetic, yet a distinct iteration of other Jazz Acting techniques. The inclusion of Jazz Aesthetics is essential to understanding how his technique and subsequent 150 productions are in conversation with current scholarship in acting theory.

In my penultimate chapter, “Queering Black Power: The Black Aesthetic, Queer Narratives, and Womanist Voices,” I argue that McClintock’s acting
technique determined his versatile repertoire and shaped an innovative aesthetic, to which I refer as the Queer Black Power Aesthetic. By putting the focus on the individual as well as the collective ensemble, his theatre promoted the principles of the Black Power Movement, but also included womanist and queer perspectives. This innovative aesthetic in the context of the Black Power Movement upsets the notion that the artists in Harlem during the Black Arts Movement were monolithic. But rather, his theory demonstrates that Black Revolutionary Theatre emanated from the 1960s can and should exist in one theatre. The aesthetic more specifically is rooted in collective memory, a shared past, and yet explores the complexity of experiences of Black communities of the twice-marginalized ilk.

Finally, in Chapter Four “Canonizing Enslaved Africans and Street Folk: The Contemporary Black Classics in Training and Performance,” I investigate McClintock’s efforts to create a canon of Black literature within his repertory structure, which I argue are part of the African Continuum and I believe still relevant to contemporary audiences. I have delineated two sub-genres, those that fall under either the antebellum/post-antebellum time period, and those productions/plays that portray Street Life in the 1960s and 1970s. McClintock’s productions of the Contemporary Black Classics embody the Queer Black Power Aesthetic in practice and the absence of these works would result in a gap in history.

My dissertation situates McClintock’s technique and productions in the sociopolitical contexts of Harlem and Richmond and demonstrates his influence
during the Black Arts Movement that continues to shape the American theatre.

My work is an historical intervention of the Black Arts Movement to broaden the scope of influential acting teachers who created space for African Americans to demand their lived experiences be considered in American consciousness. In the dissertation and future pursuits, I intend to unearth McClintock’s Jazz Acting Technique: a Common Sense Approach as a significant contribution to the jazz aesthetic scholarship and Black acting theory. I analyze productions and applications of the technique in performance through the Queer Black Power Aesthetic. Ultimately, I argue McClintock’s efforts to establish the contemporary Black Classics fundamentally urges future generations of actors to progress the African Continuum and also historians and educators to consider the complexity, contradictions, and empowerment of the Black Arts Movement.
CHAPTER ONE

Defining Ourselves: Healing through Jazz Technique in Training and Performance

In 1972, Ernie McClintock wrote the following mission statement for Black theatre artists:

For the Black actor and audience, the theater should culminate in a feeling of sharing of self in a spiritually uplifting and reflective, unique experience. The self-awareness and awareness of others should result in seeking more and greater such experiences, which in turn, will lead to conscious or unconscious positive actions.85

Even though his methodology morphed and shifted during his forty-year career, Jazz Actors Technique: A Common Sense Approach to Acting remained rooted in a technique established in the principles of self-determination through healing and community. McClintock developed and taught his acting technique in his Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech, and the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble. He defined common sense acting as “a process of character formation, which requires the actor to constantly present to his audience information that will show the totality of his character, the relationship he has with all those he encounters, the specifics of place and environment and his/her relationship to it, the specifics of his objective, and the character’s justification of his objective.”86

Common sense acting is the name for the technique from 1965 – 1986, and in 1986 he identified the approach as Jazz Acting, with an emphasis on the melody as the script, and the actors as musicians riffing in performance. In his resume,

85 McClintock, “Perspective on Black Acting,” 80.
McClintock penned the approach as Jazz Actors Technique: The Common Sense Approach to Acting. Through these programs, McClintock emphasized the importance of cultural awareness, language use or word value, and a combination of the use of observation and imagination, to develop and portray characters to the audience, respond with actors in the moment, and create a unified ensemble with the common goal of artistic excellence.

According to Levy Lee Simon, award winning playwright, screenwriter, actor, and director, “The technique is different from the standpoint in that it addressed how African Americans, or those from African descent walk the planet. We have a different way of being, a different way of connecting to each other, which Ernie eventually associated with jazz. It’s about how we communicate as a group, with different rhythms that we showed on stage.” The activities and exercises in the rehearsal process reflected jazz, physically and vocally. If the ensemble is in concert with one another, the performance reflects the aesthetics present in jazz. The technique does not suggest that those not of African descent would not be able to benefit from it. However, it is founded in McClintock’s recognition to provide an effective technique for African American actors.

Contemporary artists trained by Ernie McClintock span across the United States, from the west coast to the east coast, and from the north to the south. Their careers range from teaching, directing, playwriting, and acting, in which they strive to promote self-expression, as well as a shared communal experience.

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88 Levy Lee Simon, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 18, 2015.
The dozens of artists interviewed for this research emphasized that McClintock’s teachings profoundly influenced the course of their careers. Their work continues to perpetuate McClintock’s effort to provide a creative, and flexible space to express one’s own experience, yet in a collective and spiritual community with a tangible result. Ernie McClintock’s impetus to find a connection with humanity and with his African American community, along with his innovative and culturally specific approach to theatre is demonstrated in his approach to the staging of productions.

The notion of an ever-present reciprocal relationship between the political and cultural climate with theatre and a given society is certainly not a novel concept. However, the innovation of McClintock’s theatre and the relationship to his historical moment is distinguished by his understanding of the political and social climate, in relation to the actor and the acting technique, which then manifests in productions. In an interview in 1973, McClintock explained:

The most important part of the creative process is that the creative artist has his creative input, which goes beyond just interpreting what someone else wants. That’s part of it, but it’s only part. The other part is what the actor wants, being true. A lot of actors find themselves restricted by having to work in situations with directors who are interested in only their point of view being presented.\(^{89}\)

McClintock considered his actors collaborators, and based his play selection for Advanced Workshops at the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech, and the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble productions, based on the individuals and collective makeup of the ensemble. In contrast, in mainstream theatre, actors are

\(^{89}\) McClintock, interview.
hired to interpret the vision of a director, and often, actors are not cast until following months of collaboration between designers and producers.

The politically charged context birthed the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech within the theatrical explosion in 1960s Harlem, known as the Black Arts Movement, adhering to W. E. B. Du Bois’ “for, by, about, and near us” creed. For McClintock, his school was known as a veritable temple of healing in which the program worked to portray characters through the Black perspective, and connect the primarily Black audiences to their shared past, and unification in their present struggles in 1960s Harlem. His productions necessitated a healing component because as historian Marc Primus articulates, “In order to represent others, you need to understand yourself.” Within the 1960s and 1970s context where Black bodies were incarcerated, murdered, and stereotyped, Ernie McClintock’s Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech, 127th Street Repertory Ensemble, and Harlem Jazz Theatre, gave a voice to Black actors who had been ostracized from their communities, including prostitutes, drug dealers, and dark-skinned actors considered to be outside the perceived norms of light-skinned beauty.

Key terms in this chapter include technique, ritual, style, symbolic reversal, word value, historia-drama, kaleidoscopic character, cultural trauma, collective memory, and self-determination. McClintock defines technique as a resource for the actor to develop unique, truthful, penetrating, and memorable

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91 Marc Primus, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, August 25, 2015.
characters. Each character that an actor portrays should be distinct. He argues that the acquisition of a few “tricks” that are constantly repeated do not represent the qualities of a skilled and concerned performer.\(^{92}\) Ritual will be defined according to Beverly Robinson as a recurring pattern of action that represents the desire to begin life anew, and the need to find some way of expressing that desire.\(^{93}\)

Symbolic reversal defined by Paul Carter Harrison, “implies a code-switching that permits us to engage experience on the level of symbolic meaning, as to disentangle the assumptions projected by the dominant culture about the process of Black social life, and to claim authority over the existence of its authenticity.”\(^{94}\) He also identifies kaleidoscopic character as essential to African American history in that there is not one memory or one Black experience of the past, but rather multiple perspectives.

McClintock’s legacy shifts our greater understanding of acting theory and the Black Arts Movement. He was a visionary who changed the course of actors’ lives, and his influence continues through those who worked with him. I aim to expand his work, influence, and techniques to a wider audience, to benefit actors, teachers, scholars, and activists. By placing the scholarship of Monica White Ndounou, John Ernst, Larry Neal, Peniel Joseph, Mike Sell, James Smethurst, and Ron Eyerman in conversation with my original research with his students and

\(^{92}\) Bailey, “Rapping with Ernie McClintock,” 2.


collaborators, and through archival research from multiple sources including but not limited to the private collections of generous individuals, the power of McClintock’s methods are revealed. Through unpacking the technique in its context and in conversation with acting theory, I demonstrate how McClintock’s method provides an entry point for actors of color; an entry point to scripted and unscripted material in that it effectively addresses the differing way in which people of color experience and relate to the world and society. McClintock aided in “defining ourselves” through community healing in Jazz Acting. As a result, he prepared students for remarkable productions, and the ability to represent characters from differing Black experiences, whether an actor was working on a play based in the slave narratives, or a play about gang violence in Newark. In the following chapter I explore McClintock’s paradigm shift to what Monica White Ndounou primarily refers to as (OJT) On-the-Job-Training for actors, due to the historical moment of Richmond, Virginia.95

A Visionary Emerges

Ernie Claude McClintock, born February 19, 1937, on the Southside of Chicago, grew up in a post-World War II era, a racially and politically charged environment, and a home life filled with cultural arts: He listened to the blues with his father, played piano with his mother and sisters, and frequently attended the Regal Theatre to listen to the music of Sarah Vaughan, Dina Washington, Ella

95 Monica White Ndounou, “Acting Your Color: The Power and Paradox of Acting for Black Americans” (lecture, Center for Humanities at Tufts University, Medford, MA, February 24, 2015).
Fitzgerald, and Cab Calloway. McClintock was exposed to both mainstream theatre and popular culture, but as an African American born in Chicago, his lived experience and immediate surroundings were grounded in Black art, and music such as the blues and jazz.

Textbooks such as Brockett and Hildy’s *History of the Theatre* tend to applaud the commercial theatre and productions during McClintock’s adolescent years that were produced through the White gaze. Prominent shows in the mainstream theatre at the time included Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* (1920), George Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* (1935), and Marc Connelly’s *The Green Pastures* (1936). Black actors like Charles Gilpin and Paul Robeson subverted the Black Buck stereotype and commanded their performances as Brutus Jones, but at the same time many of these mainstream so-called Black productions were conceived by White writers and producers, and perpetuated racial myths. Furthermore, Brockett and Hildy admonished the work of Black writers such as Theodore Ward’s *Big White Fog* (1937) and Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940). This genre of Black drama wrestles with questions of Black masculinity, class struggle, and tensions of Chicago’s inner city dealing with the politics and pressure of racism. Brockett and Hildy purport that *Native Son* “… showed the terrible effects of social evils on the life of the protagonist. But, if there was still a long way to go, there had been much improvement since 1917 …

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97 In Donald Bogle’s research he traces stereotypes from their inception to contemporary manifestations. The brutal black buck is barbaric, subhuman, feral, and full of black rage. Bogle attributes Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* to cementing this stereotype, among others, in the social conscience. Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, and Bucks*, 10.
even if they had not yet been permitted to demonstrate their full potential."  

However, according to prominent scholar Harry J. Elam Jr., writers such as Ward and Green actively challenged stereotypes in their work on the mainstream stage. I have yet to find McClintock’s commentary on Ward or Wright, but this bias against alternative voices from a culture echoes McClintock’s own devotions to challenging stereotypes. Furthermore, McClintock grew up in Chicago and his experience reveals yet another perspective; a city filled with music and theatre, rooted in African American culture.

While pursuing his Associate’s degree in Medical Technology at Crane College from 1954-1956, he performed in Noel Coward’s *Fumed Oak* (1936), however when he saw legendary actor Frank Silvera on stage, his career aspirations forever changed. He attended a performance of Michael V. Gazzo’s *A Hatful of Rain* (1955) at the Regal Theatre starring Frank Silvera, Steve McQueen, and Vivian Blaine. McClintock attributed witnessing the production, and in particular Silvera’s performance, as the moment his life work would be in the theatre. *A Hatful of Rain* originated on Broadway and toured nationally, impressing audiences across the United States. Silvera, a Jamaican-born, Boston University graduate and award-winning actor, established himself as one of the most versatile actors in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s despite the initial resistance of mainstream producers to cast a light-skinned Negro.

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Forty years after McClintock witnessed Silvera’s performance he recalled, “It was a tremendous and provocative play for me. I never knew that you could put on stage something so real.”100 That following week he bought tickets to the theatre for every night, and over the next six years he appeared in three dozen shows in Chicago including *A Taste of Honey* (1958), *Hello Out There* (1941), *Please Communicate* (1954), *Enrico the Fourth* (1921), *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), *Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright* (1963), *Pentagleize* (1968), and *Once Upon a Savage Night* (1964).

In a 1996 interview with Jamantha Williams Watson, his “stint” in the United States army is mentioned, and although not much is documented beyond his resume in the archives, his enrollment in the armed services echoes many other Americans from the Black Arts Movement. Young African American men enlisted and drafted into the military fueled frustrations, and demonstrated that the

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100 Ibid.
government put men of color on the front lines abroad, but enforced Jim Crow segregation laws established in 1865 during the Reconstruction period.\textsuperscript{101} Although McClintock was not on the front lines of war, a common theme that persists in Black soldiers’ experience is the notion that they are enlisted to essentially aid the United States government as a moral compass for nations who are violating human rights laws, as in the case of Nazi Germany and World War II. However, after soldiers returned home from war, they faced federally sanctioned segregation in public facilities, places of employment, schools, and voting taxations.\textsuperscript{102} This growing hypocrisy of being asked to fight and even die for a country built on the backs of enslaved Africans and a government that sanctioned discrimination came to the fore. I have yet to discover written evidence of McClintock’s belief in this hypocrisy, but this speculation is based on his political affiliation and provocative theatre. While in residence at the United States Armed Forces Institute, he continued to create theatre by organizing and directing his mates in amateur productions until he returned to Chicago in 1962 to study at the Helen Espie Fine Arts Institute.

From 1962–1964, prior to his move to New York, McClintock studied formal theatre training with Helen Espie, who influenced his acting technique. Espie, a Scottish immigrant, created her own studio, The Helen Espie of Dramatic Arts located in the Fine Arts Building. Information about the history of the school is not readily accessible, however Espie was known as a leading drama

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\textsuperscript{102} Monica White Ndounou, “1950s Finding an Audience: Assertion or Assimilation” (lecture, Tufts University, Medford, MA, October 18, 2012).
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coach who worked with many actors from Second City including Bill Murray. McClintock student Thaddeus Daniels, a successful film and theatre actor acclaimed for his Off-Broadway performance in Layon Gray’s *Black Angels Over Tuskegee* (2014), recalls that Espie taught McClintock how to read language by “sitting him down and training him so that he could pick up a book and read it cold.”

In her approach of text, she emphasized pronouns and absolutes. Regarding pronouns, each time an actor utters a pronoun, they need to know exactly how the character feels about that person, place, or thing. Espie considered “never, every, always, and don’t” absolutes that should be considered as guideposts of language. For Daniels, McClintock’s evolution of Espie’s approach to absolutes evolved for him to connect his actors to the music and rhythm of a sentence. Espie’s early influence on McClintock regarding thoughtful consideration of language is a staple component of understanding the script as a melody, and the actor as the musician.

While McClintock studied with Espie and performed in Chicago, the Black Power revolutionary spirit matured, and the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961 exposed the hypocrisy and blatant disregard for bodies of African ancestry perpetuated by the United States government. Lumumba was the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Congo, and he called upon the United States and United Nations to aid his efforts to suppress the rebel uprisings backed by Belgian forces. The United States did not find it economically or

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104 Thaddeus Daniels, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, August 15, 2015.
politically beneficial to engage with this newly formed democratic state and so Lumumba’s government accepted aid from the former USSR, even though Lumumba publicly refuted communist ideology.105 During the height of the Cold War, American officials found an excuse to further distance themselves from Congo’s civil unrest, and plotted failed attempts to poison the Congolese leader, presumably from the desk of President Eisenhower. In Madeleine G. Klab’s book Congo Cables, she chronicles the CIA conducting a search in Congo to capture Lumumba, and deliver him to the rebels. When John F. Kennedy won the presidency, he opposed such sanctions and intended on releasing the Prime Minister from prison. However, three days before the inauguration, Patrice Lumumba was murdered by a firing squad, with evidence of Belgian involvement.106

Prior to Lumumba’s assassination, plays from Black writers primarily centered on the domestic sphere and family dramas such as in Native Son and Big White Fog, but as scholar James Hatch observes, perhaps due to the social and cultural exigencies of the times, family dramas were less prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s. Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun (1959) prolifically predicts the shift from the house to a reckoning with outside forces. Peniel Joseph contends that Hansberry “trumpeted the arrival of a cultural nationalism destined to be associated almost exclusively with Black Power militants.”107 Rather, dramas celebrated the political awakening of the Black masses and critiqued the

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105 Joseph, Til the Midnight Hour, 38.
107 Joseph, 'Til the Midnight Hour, 26.
assumed apathy of the Black bourgeoisie class. Amiri Baraka (formerly Leroi Jones), poet and activist, led the charge against mass-mediated racism and the commodification of art in his 1964 poem, *A poem for Willie Best* (1964), where he suggests that African American artists have been seen as merely “entertainers,” reminiscent of Blackface minstrelsy. As part of the Black Arts community, McClintock addressed the collective struggle against cultural, political, economic compromises in art through creating an institution as an act of self-determination.

Lumumba’s assassination catapulted action-based initiatives and solidification of the Black Power philosophy, the theoretical crux of McClintock’s training program and productions. According to Peniel Joseph, the assassination of the Congo leader transformed, up and coming activists and Black nationalists to radicals. Theories, concepts, and ideologies culminated in action-based revolutionary initiatives such as African Americans’ reclamation of language to self-define and self-determine. For example, on February 15, 1961 nationalists stormed the United Nations and demonstrators including Dr. Maya Angelou. When interviewed by reporters, the protestors of African descent proclaimed that they were no longer Negroes, but Afro-Americans. The U.S. involvement in Lumumba’s assassination was a breaking point for Black Americans to demand social justice after centuries of dehumanization, daily discriminations from police enforcement, and stereotypes in popular culture, and create a unified people across the African Diaspora. McClintock aligns with this reclamation through naming his school Afro-American, connecting him with his global community.

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108 Joseph, *‘Til the Midnight Hour*, 40.
In 1964 and still today, commentators on media outlets such as Fox News and CNN admonish what they consider Black organizations and institutions promoting “reverse racism” but as McClintock demonstrated in acting training, an Afrocentric approach combats stereotypes perpetuated by White training techniques and reflected in mainstream film and theatre. In 1973 he explained the core issue:

I felt that most Black actors had not been trained properly in this country. Most Black actors had been trained through White approaches, White techniques. What happened on the stage for them was that a kind of imitative of White people and sometimes imitating themselves rather than BEING themselves. Imitating the imitation.109

The skewed Eurocentric acting studios, and the history leading up to the Black Power movement also helps in understanding the critical need for self-definition and healing after centuries of dehumanization and the vicious stereotypes inflicted on African American communities through popular culture and federal institutions. The cultural trauma experienced by African Americans is perpetuated in popular culture and is a dangerous cycle because, “As a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory.”110

Leaders such as Malcolm X emerged in the public sphere, unified communities to collectively remember in order to benefit society as a whole

McClintock further realized the necessity of forming his own school and training after attending Lou Gossett’s Academy of Acting from 1965 – 1966, which was an integrated conservatory in lower Manhattan. In the archives

109 McClintock, interview.
110 Eyerman, Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity, 1.
McClintock does not address his experience directly, but he does include the school on his resume as part of his training as an actor. McClintock’s intuition impressed Gossett and the young actor began to teach classes at the conservatory on the weekends. When asked about the school he simply states that he did not want to be in an integrated situation, but through that experience he had “the freedom and riddled by this burning desire to create a Black theatre school.”

McClintock’s pedagogy of an all-Black school echoes Malcolm X’s “The Ballot or the Bullet Speech” in which he prioritized Black unity over interracial alliances. McClintock revered Malcolm X and aligned with his philosophy so much so that at his school, and in his theatre companies he would revive N.R. Davidson’s *El Hajj Malik* throughout his career. From an acting standpoint, McClintock identified a need for Black self-expression from an Afrocentric point of view, a community of actors, and a professional Black theatre school. In 1965, he came to this artistic and educational awakening, the very same year Malcolm X was assassinated.

**1965 – 1979: The Formation of Common Sense Acting**

While attending and teaching at Lou Gossett’s Academy, McClintock rented an apartment on 137th Street and formed the Afro-American Repertory Theatre. He taught classes out of his Harlem rental, two miles south of the Audubon Ballroom where Malcolm X was assassinated in February of that year. Just as three years prior, protestors outside the United Nations told the media to

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112 McClintock, interview.
employ the term “Afro-American” to self-define, Ernie McClintock defined his training program as rooted in his culture and ancestry. McClintock was one of the earliest producers and teachers of the Black Theatre Movement in Harlem to establish a community and culturally-centered theatre training program and company in the Black Arts Movement Era. McClintock’s acting technique and professional program for Black actors is rooted in the initiatives to self-define and self-determine, while it provided a space that was free from the White gaze to heal and honor their individuality, and yet connect with one another’s shared past.

Amiri Baraka is acknowledged as the revolutionary leader of the Black Arts Movement; his poetry and theatre denounced the White gaze yet McClintock’s early contribution as creator of the Black Theatre Movement has not been recognized until now. A well-known anecdote regarding the Black Arts Movement details that after the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, prized-poet and playwright Amiri Baraka divorced his Jewish wife, moved from his Lower East Side residence and established the Black Arts Repertory School (BART/S) in Harlem with the intention of creating a theatre of revolution.”113 Regardless of the simplified or perhaps exaggerated story of Baraka’s pilgrimage to Upper Manhattan, the unabashed marriage of radical politics and theatre as a site of revolution is the true significance of the anecdote. By the time Baraka opened BART/S, McClintock had already been conducting classes in Common Sense acting on 137th Street, which challenges the notion that Baraka’s school was the earliest model of Afrocentric revolutionary theatre. Furthermore, McClintock’s

work, inclusive of queer and womanist perspectives, upsets the notion that the Black Power is solely founded in militant, heteronormative ideals.

Baraka and McClintock, as two prominent pioneers, share foundational belief systems of Black Power and theatre as an instrument of social justice, yet they diverge terms of specific approaches in the creation of art and development of the actor. McClintock focused on developing training techniques for Black actors. When he was asked if Baraka had influenced his theatre he said, “Not really, no… The Afro-American Studio is an educational theatre school. We are not primarily a theatre, a community theatre. That is an important distinction. This means that when I started the studio I was concerned first with the development of Black actors.”

Marc Primus, who worked with Baraka prior to meeting McClintock noted Baraka’s distanced support of the Afro-American Studio’s productions of his work: “I think Baraka came to see Baptism but not quite clear. He supported us doing his work but he didn’t seem to be an admirer of the work. He understood the gayness underneath than our general audience. He knew that he had to balance it with the pseudo-machismo I think so he wasn’t openly supportive of the theatre.” Although friction exists between the assertions of Baraka’s Black hyper masculinity, McClintock ideologically aligned with the notion of self-determining a theatrical space for Black actors. Moreover, Black theatre aimed to function as a conduit for Black liberation, and express a particular aesthetic connecting the African diaspora separate from the Aristotelian model:

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114 McClintock, interview.
115 Primus, interview.
This should be a theatre of World Spirit. Where the spirit can be shown to be the most competent force in the world. Force. Spirit. Feeling. The language will be anybody’s, but tightened by the poet’s backbone. And even the language must show what the acts are in this consciousness epic, what’s happening. We will talk about the world, and the preciseness with which we are able to summon the world, will be our art. Art is method.”

Baraka’s treatise “The Revolutionary Art” is a foundational text of the Black Arts Movement. However, in Baraka’s 1960s framework, critics such as scholars Alain Locke, Gayle Addison, and Nikki Giovanni criticize Baraka for his monolithic approach, which excluded queer and female perspectives.

In addition to McClintock and Baraka’s differing perspectives on multiple aesthetics and inclusion, their training as artists (Baraka, the poet, and McClintock, the actor-director) developed separate approaches to manifest self-determination. Prior to the BART/S, Baraka was an integral poet in the Umbra Workshop in the Lower East Side, a protonationalist community that embraced a radical black identity, but without an action-based community initiative. An important distinction between their two theatres is that Baraka promoted militant radical “terror tactics to forge unity in the community, wanted to reject individualism and emphasize community and community action.”

Community healing effectively occurs when the individual actor comes to self-acceptance.

Although BART/S lasted only one year, the establishment of the institution showed the potential of a revolutionary theatre, and McClintock’s theatre continued to demonstrate that a Black Theatre could serve the community

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and spark a cultural revolution. As documented by Larry Neal, scholar and Black Arts Movement figure, BART/S opened with producing Baraka’s one act *Experimental Death Unit #1* (1969), *Black Mass* (1968), *J-E-L-L-O* (1964) and his Obie-award winning *The Dutchman* (1964). The school was initially initiated by the HARYOU-Act (Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited), in which the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) provided $110 million dollars to Black educational programs. The New York power structure targeted BART/S by halting funds because the school unabashedly aimed to destroy the incumbent governmental system through revolutionary art. Although McClintock did receive funding from governmental organizations and programs, he was skeptical of total dependence on federal funding. BART/S confirmed this fear and presumably, he maintained complete control of his institutions to avoid a political agenda from infiltrating his school.

McClintock’s longevity as a producer and director can be attributed to his control, which proved effective given the political unrest and unstable swift changes in governmental administration. The outcries for social justice were propelled for varying reasons, however the assassination of President John F. Kennedy devastated the country, particularly because he was a symbol of hope for the working class. By 1963, there were thousands of stories of suffering and sacrifice including students being assaulted for sitting at Whites-only lunch

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counters and reports of police brutalizing Black bodies with cattle prods.\textsuperscript{120} On December 28, 1963, the Student Non-Violating Committee (SNCC), led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., mobilized hundreds of thousands of activists for the March On Washington. John Lewis, the prominent Civil Rights activist turned congressman, criticized by Donald J. Trump in January 2017, chaired SNCC in 1965. White liberals censored Lewis and urged him to revise his speech in terms of criticisms of Kennedy and removing particular words such as “masses” and “revolution” for unsubstantiated fears of mob mentality.\textsuperscript{121} As a result, SNCC became quite concerned that White liberals would shape their political agenda. In the spring of 1965 SNCC organized the march from Selma to Montgomery with Martin Luther King, Jr. as the spokesman.

After Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, New Radicalism gave way to a Freedom of Speech Movement, the second wave of feminists defining their own goals, the Vietnam War, and civil unrest, which swiftly took hold of the country. Civil Rights became ancillary to White liberals, from college campuses call for free speech, to White feminists’ fight for equal rights, and SNCC’s move towards Black Power, a separatist ideology. LBJ took great offense to the riots: “LBJ saw the riots as direct insult on him, he said he had tried so hard for every child of color to grow up in a nice house, eat breakfast— he essentially saw the riots as ingratitude.”\textsuperscript{122} Therefore, during this time in

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
America, the Black Power movement was understood as the culmination of frustration, and inequality, and rested on the side of confrontation, as opposed to healing. However, McClintock’s school and productions worked on the individual’s development, and on a community basis to heal and self-define, a sanctity of Black Pride, and a temple of healing unlike any other institution.

When McClintock moved to 126th Street in 1966 and renamed his school the Afro-American Studio for Acting and Speech, Stokely Carmichael rallied Black Power activists. On June 16, 1966, Carmichael, the recently appointed president of SNCC, proclaimed, “The time for running has come to an end … Black Power. It’s time we stand up and take over; move on over [whitey] or we’ll move on over you.” As Peniel Joseph notes, history books gloss over Carmichael and relegate him as a radical separatist, and neglect to acknowledge the collaboration of the leader with Dr. King. The absence of Stokely Carmichael in the Civil Rights/Black Power Movement mirrors the absence of McClintock as one of the fundamental figures in forming the Black Theatre Movement.

Whereas Carmichael was in the public view, mobilizing activists and was named the unofficial Prime Minister of the emerging Black Panther Party, McClintock was in the studio developing his training as a father figure. Both Carmichael and McClintock connected to their African diaspora, historical memory, and collective response. Beverly J. Robison astutely notes that the commonality is not based on skin color, but communal practices and a worldview. Historical memory is based on theories of the intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois where

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it is “the study of cultural struggle, of contested truths, of moments, events or even texts in history that thresh out rival versions of the past which are in turn put to the service of the present.”

Scholar David Blight contends that in Du Bois’ writings, there was a tension between art, politics, and the pursuit of scientific truths. Blight recognizes a distinction in Du Bois’ writings from a social science focus towards an emphasis on the power of the arts to create a counter memory. Du Bois stated, “History and the other social sciences were to be my weapons, to be sharpened and applied by research and writing.”

Creating a counter memory is a strategy for confronting and overcoming the traditional narrative, often the White supremacists’ version of American history. Even though in my research thus far there is no documentation of McClintock proclaiming he was creating a counter memory, I argue that the training of his actors, and his establishment of the contemporary Black Classics worked to create a counter memory that challenged the traditional White narrative.

Each actor interviewed for this project, whether from the New York camp or Richmond camp, emphasized how Ernie McClintock connected with his Black pupils in a more effective way than the traditionally White-trained acting teachers. His approach was centered on the totality of African American experiences as opposed to the Stella Adler approach, which looks at a character’s “slice of life.” McClintock articulates this distinction:

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125 Ibid., 12.

126 Woodley asserts that at first when he attended Julliard there was a conflict at first, but with time and experience was able to use both techniques, which are of equal value in his experience. Other popular techniques include teachings of Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner, Harold Clurman, Michael Chekhov, and Konstantin Stanislavsky. Sheldon Woodley, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 27, 2015.
A character on stage for a half hour must not be alive for a half hour, if that character is 20 years old, he must be alive for 20 years in that half hour. It is a totality of the experiences that must be dealt with from the standpoint from the actor himself. There are numerous things for him to be involved in as he submerges himself into the character. We aren’t talking about Stanislavsky. We are talking about the totality of an experience, the totality of a Black experience actually.\textsuperscript{127}

His connection to his students via his African American corporeality and ontological truth is an iteration of what scholar Paul Carter Harrison calls symbolic reversal. Symbolic reversal of social and sacred codes is critical for the “transformation of consciousness” needed to overcome the negative connotations of Blackness projected by White Western consciousness.\textsuperscript{128} Through this symbolic reversal, there is a new opportunity to reassess, revalorize, and codify experiences in accord with values rooted in the culturally specific traditions of Black experience.

Paul Carter Harrison, prominent playwright of the Black Arts Movement, recognizes the contribution of artists like Ernie McClintock who infused the theatre with reverence for the ancestors, as well as the value for an individual’s experience. Although these artists grew out of the Black Arts Movement from the 1960s and 1970s, figures like McClintock continued the mission of their theatres well into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.\textsuperscript{129} As the Black Arts Movement evolved, it developed a performance practice that framed the folk traditions of urban and rural Black life.

\textsuperscript{127} McClintock, interview.
\textsuperscript{128} Code switching is a linguistic term that refers to the switching between two languages and dialects within the same conversation. Carter Harrison, \textit{Black Theatre, Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora}, 3.
\textsuperscript{129} Barbara Ann Teer is the founder of the National Black Theatre in Harlem that is still in existence. She established an aesthetic based in the African roots of her Black community. She created a new lexicon applied to the theatre, like “decruddin.” Smethurst, \textit{Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s}, 107.
with both structured conventional plots and avant-garde experiences. Harrison explains that the work from this era revealed an invocative, testimonial language of voice and gesture to drive actions into a kinetic, seamless weave of non-linear storytelling. McClintock’s technique is in line with the idea of a circular, jazz approach to storytelling, rather than a linear approach. McClintock’s theatre is a prime example, both in acting technique and in performance, of the relationship between spiritual and mundane reality, which validated the social and moral landscape and provided immediate symbolic significance. His theatre accommodated the “kaleidoscopic character” of African diasporic memory.130

In particular Stanislavski-based programs, acting teachers implement so the actor can access memories individual to their experience, however the disconnect to Jazz Acting is that this approach would divorce a shared experience on stage. Additionally, in the United States, many teachers who have not properly studied the method purport to use traumatic memories to access emotional truth in scenes. I studied with Barbara Poitier, Marcia Haufrecht, Ron Liebman, and Gene Lasko (who all studied under Lee Strasberg), and this distortion of sense memory as “emotional recall” is not part of the program or the training. Scholars and acting theorists including Monica White Ndounou and Sharrell Luckett further argue that rehashing memories can be damaging to Black actors especially when considering the impact of cultural trauma, which as a reflective process can

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lead to a distorted identity formation because trauma links the past to the present through representations and imaginations.\(^{131}\)

At the Afro-American Studio and the Jazz Actors Theatre, the training healed and uplifted students as opposed to accessing the memory of an individual to drum up emotions. Marc Primus, co-founder along with McClintock and Walker taught courses in Black History and Black Culture. Primus says that the whole studio was a healing center to nurture spirit. Part of this healing is a specific practice that contextualizes African-inspired values and the rehabilitation of dislocation and subjugation, beginning with the Middle Passage.\(^{132}\) This relates back to the concept of the collective historical memory of the trauma, as well as the collective response of healing in a ritualized environment, the acting classroom. Primus articulated what acting was rooted in at the studio:

> Acting is about identity, you take on the identity of your characters and you have to have some sense of yourself, value yourself in order to create a character. You cannot create a character if there is nothing to create it from. Our people are longing for self-definition and learning about themselves. That’s what the studio was about. People learning who they were, so they could develop characters. That’s the first step. If you don’t have any idea, Stanislavsky or anybody is not going to help you. You have to know who you are. That’s what the definition of the studio was: it was a defining experience for the people that came there to bring them to themselves. To bring us to ourselves, that’s what it was about. I don’t think Ernie ever said that but that was his and my understanding and was from the very beginning, our work was about defining ourselves.\(^{133}\)

Primus puts this approach of self-definition and cultural education in the context of the Black Theatre Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The Black Power Movement and Black Arts Movement in this historical moment engaged in a


\(^{132}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{133}\) Primus, interview.
dialogue between the community and their collective memory. As Ron Eyerman argues, it was reflected in real and imagined patterns of speech, dress, and needs that would be represented in and through a Black Aesthetic.\(^{134}\)

In the early years of the Studio, along with Gwendolen Hardwick, actors Bolanyle Edwards and Suavae Mitchell articulated the community spirit of the Studio and how it created a place of belonging, education, and healing. Edwards even notes that the company of actors believed they were all reincarnated and had known each other in a past life. She said “At that time, so many of us were trying to be somebody else and had not accepted ourselves because of what we were told for so long and for so many years.”\(^ {135}\) Edwards’ experience of belonging and knowing each other in a past life is underlined in a sociological and historical context by Ron Eyerman’s research. He asserts in his assessment of the Black Power movement and the action-based initiatives by the Black Panthers, that this type of Black Nationalism was a redemptive narrative emanating from urban centers such as Harlem. Sociologically, slavery represented a point of identification, a shared heritage, a unified whole, and the creation of a positive African culture.\(^ {136}\) McClintock was able to create an environment, a community, to affirm positive self-image, honor their ancestors, and determine the future of Black Theatre.

Within the ritualistic context of the Studio, self-definition and healing are synonymous. Beverly J. Robinson’s definition of ritual works well in this

\(^{135}\) Bolanyle Edwards, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, August 25, 2015.
particular context: “Ritual can be defined as a recurring pattern of action that represents the desire to begin life anew, and the need to find some way of expressing that desire.” Furthermore, Robinson insists that Black theatre generates a transformative ritual style of work informed by the expressed strategies in the continuum of African memory through the diaspora. Therefore, when Edwards expresses that for many of the students who did not accept themselves, or tried to be someone else based on centuries of dehumanization, McClintock created a culturally nurturing environment to begin life anew. This does not suggest an erasure of the past, but rather an understanding of Black history and its struggles, in order to rejuvenate oneself to create a collective ensemble of like-minded African American artists. Inclusion suggests African Americans being regarded as citizens in the formal sense, and as human beings in the social sense. Those that experience discrimination from the day they are born in the United States ideally share the cultural trauma in a collective space. 

The Black Theatre Movement and the establishment of other Afrocentric schools are situated in this historical context and tumultuous political landscape of the late 1960s. In particular, prior to Nixon’s impeachment, historians such as William Chafe mark 1968 as the end of hope for civil rights activists. As Chafe contends, 1968 was one of the most devastating years in recent history because the events resulted in a defeat for those who sought a new society based on peace,

138 Ibid., 326 – 327.
139 Al Suave Mitchell, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, August 24, 2015.
equality, and justice, while those who defended the status quo were victorious.

For example, in the beginning of 1968, President Johnson brought home General Westmoreland from the Vietnam War telling the American public we were on the verge of winning. Soon after, the Tet attack occurred, in which 1,600 Americans were killed, and 8,000 were wounded. The American public was growing more and more distrustful of their government and the last strain of hope for social justice in the government was swiftly annihilated.

Robert F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were the two prominent figures from the Civil Rights movement who fought for the voiceless in the United States. After his brother’s assassination, Robert F. Kennedy’s politics became increasingly focused on the underclass of America. He even told the public that the oppressed would inevitably initiate a revolution. With Kennedy’s run in the primary, he unified Americans from all ethnicities based on his desire to fight for an underrepresented constituency in government. Additionally, Dr. King became increasingly frustrated by the lack of action by the incumbent president, and his politics grew more revolutionary. Furthermore, with Nixon’s impeachment in 1974, the traditional narrative tells us that the American public became less concerned about civil rights, and more concerned about the abuse of the presidential office.

Although the general American public seemingly disengaged with civil rights, the Black Theatre Movement established professional companies that were connected by efforts to bring Black stories, told and performed by Black actors, to their communities but with different approaches. In 1968, Douglas Turner Ward
opened the Negro Ensemble Company to “provide a center where Black creative
talent could be nurtured and a Black audience built.” The Negro Ensemble
Company (NEC) and the Afro-American Studio were aligned with fostering
Black talent, but according to Helmar Cooper and Breena Clarke, the NEC was
less inclusive of women with darker skin. Gregory Wallace distinguishes
McClintock’s 127th Street Repertory Ensemble from the Negro Ensemble
Company with regards to structure: “[The 127th Street Rep] was different from
other theatres. It was not as overly structured like when you went to NEC. He
gave room for a good kind of madness because of the rehearsal process and the
possibility to experiment in service of the text.” The NEC has also been
criticized for not employing a separatist approach; Clayton Riley of the New York
Times accused the company of being “a new form of White art in blackface” most
likely because of accepting a sizeable contribution from the Ford Foundation.

Barbara Ann Teer’s National Black Theatre resonates with the Afro-
American Studio as it relates to healing, connecting with the Harlem community,
and the legacy of the institution, which is still producing new works today. Like
McClintock, Teer’s technique and productions were decidedly separate from
White producers and White institutions. Additionally, both schools were
dedicated to improving the cultural and intellectual lives of Black people.
Entertainment was not the primary objective; in fact, it repudiated conventional
theatre as well as basic concepts of Western art. She developed the idea of “God

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142 Gregory Wallace, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 16, 2015.
conscious” art, which is guided by the creative impulse that emanates from within. The company differs from the Afro-American Studio in that it is not in line with the self-determination and revolutionary political bent producing works from Baraka and Richard Wesley.

    Director Robert Macbeth and playwright Ed Bullins led the New Lafayette Theatre (1968 – 1973), a company known for its controversial revolutionary tactics. Macbeth aimed to create a community of artists and an audience that were equal participants in the theatrical event, which echoes McClintock’s approach. However, Macbeth believed it was pretentious to say one is bringing cultural enlightenment to the disadvantaged, whereas part of McClintock’s mission included bringing Black Classic playwrights to the people, and educating his audiences. They aimed to bring Black artists closer to the community so they could be reoriented into Black life.

    Woody King Jr.’s New Federal Theatre, established in 1970 at the Henry Street Settlement in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, continues to produce theatre today where Jazz Actor Mary Hodges teaches acting. Similar to McClintock, King does not measure his success by financial or commercial gains. Rather, King’s theatre focused on supporting minority playwrights by providing a platform to showcase their work with the goal of developing talent while providing high-quality productions to diverse audiences. The New Federal Theatre focused on writers’ development, while McClintock’s priority remained the performers’ technique particular to their experience in the world.
The Billie Holiday Theatre located in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood in Brooklyn was established by Marjorie Moon in 1971 by the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, and is currently run by former McClintock student and wife of Jerome Preston Bates, Dr. Indira Etwaroo.\textsuperscript{144} The Billie was founded on the principles of community enrichment, and encourages dialogue between the theatre artists and the community.\textsuperscript{145} Moon’s mission was to provide playwrights, designers, and African Americans in all areas of theatre work, and to nurture their talent. The philosophy is quite similar to McClintock, however his focus remained on a professional school for the actor as opposed to production and design.

Marc Primus articulates how the Afro-American Studio and 127\textsuperscript{th} Street Repertory Ensemble stood out from other Black companies at the time, in particular the New Lafayette Theatre and the New Federal Theatre, in both technique and production:

Our method was more self-defining than Stanislavsky because his people were already defined as Russians and culturally defined. We wanted to define ourselves: that was the whole idea of the Black Theatre Movement was self-definition in general. I don’t think that Bob Macbeth or Woodie King were interested in that aspect of Black life, they were just interested in directing, more conventional. Ernie was absolutely not conventional and that was the value of his operation and his theatre I think. He was just not a conventional person. I don’t even think he came from the same places as Black people in theatre who were mostly bourgeois. He was certainly not bourgeois.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{146} Primus, interview.
His company and training distinguished itself from the other schools because as an actor-centered institution, McClintock balanced the individual perspectives and unifying an Afrocentric theatre. As a result, actors learned to determine their own professional and artistic futures and connected to African diaspora.

Due to the paucity of funding, the Black Theatre Movement New York-based companies unified under the Black Theatre Alliance (BTA) (1971) where McClintock was initially the Vice-President then later the President of the organizations. The Black Theatre Alliance was an organization that unified African American theatre to combine resources and write grants for federally granted funding. He made quite an impression on state and city officials in a town hall meeting discussing the repeal of state and city laws governing the sale of theater tickets, city financial aid to selected companies, a national playwriting contest, and free buses to the Broadway theater area. “For many listeners, the highlight of the day came when Ernie McClintock, director of the Afro-American Studio for Acting and Speech, took the podium to denounce the Black Report as ‘an overt act of prejudice against the Black community’” for failing to take into account the spread of neighborhood Black and Spanish theatrical productions.”147 He was dressed in a dungaree suit and demanded that a greater share of public funds be challenged into the Black Theatre Alliance. He went on to say, “Joe Papp [Artistic Director of the Public Theatre] has no more right to be funded to produce Black theater than I do to produce Yiddish theater.”148 McClintock

148 Ibid.
insisted that the administrators of Consumer and Cultural Affairs listen to his colleagues who were not scheduled to speak despite the town hall meeting running overtime. Shouts of support erupted from the standing room audience supporting McClintock’s request. Hazel Bryant, BTA secretary and founder of the Afro-American Total Theatre, took the floor and began singing the Black spiritual “Done Made My Vow and I’ll Never Turn Back” as an anthem of Black Theatre. This incident reported by The New York Times, demonstrates McClintock’s leadership in the Black Arts Movement as well as his deeply held belief to include other voices to represent the Black Theatre Movement. In addition to uniting Black Theatre Companies and distinguishing his own training, in 1973 Vivian Robinson established the AUDELCO organization “…to stimulate interest in the performing arts in Black communities” with their annual awards to acknowledge excellence in the Black theatre community.” The AUDELCO awards have continued to produce an annual awards show in Harlem to honor African American achievements in the theatre. McClintock was a co-organizer of this annual awards ceremony in which the first AUDELCO ceremony was held at the Afro-American Studio for Speech & Acting.

With the election of Richard Nixon in 1969 and his subsequent impeachment in 1974, McClintock’s leadership in the Black Theatre Alliance was instrumental in assuring that even with a conservative economic policy and cutting of funding, the movement lived on. Therefore, artists from the Black Arts Movement continued to work towards a united, self-determined people in their respective communities, and progress the African Continuum of educating future
generations. This is significant because the Black Arts Movement did not simply end in 1974. Although William Chafe acknowledges that there were few Americans with the psychic or social space to consider economic or social reform, this is true of White liberals in government, but in Harlem these issues continued to be at the fore of theatre. Rather, the movement progressed and changed the landscape of the American theatre with McClintock as an instrumental influence that persists into the 21st century.

The Technique Develops

Ernie McClintock’s Jazz Acting: A Common Sense Approach to Acting developed in the context of the tumult of the 1960s and 1970s, in which his school predates the establishment of companies that are more often acknowledged in Black Arts Movement scholarship. When interviewing actors that worked and studied under McClintock, they all emphasized that the technique centers on both ensemble work and individual artistic expression. However, when they speak of the technique in particular, there are varying answers as far as the foundational, basic level, due to the evolving nature of the technique and changing political times. Through my research, it has become clear that throughout McClintock’s career, his intuition guided him in terms of giving an actor what they needed based on individual challenges, as opposed to a “one size fits all” approach to acting. In Harold Clurman’s The Fervent Years, the director chronicles the history of the Group Theatre who subscribed to Stanislavski’s approach. Eventually, teachers including Sanford Meisner, Lee Strasberg, and Stella Adler

149 Chafe, The Unfinished Journey, 72.
established their own individual techniques and schools. Specifically, their theoretical approaches can all be traced back to the Stanislavski-based system developed in the Group Theatre in 1931.\(^{150}\) Although they have varying approaches, Clurman emphasizes that the Group Theatre was committed to “bring the actor much closer to the content of the play, to link the actor as an individual with the creative purpose of the playwright.”\(^{151}\) As Black actors, due to cultural trauma and lack of Black playwrights taught in these schools, the White gaze projects stereotypes on Black bodies. Furthermore, there is a need to strengthen the community and not “serve” White playwrights. For McClintock each actor had to begin with an open and free instrument being comfortable in his or her own skin without self-consciousness. In the context of the 1960s, segregation and discriminatory practices inflicted second-class citizenship on Black bodies from sitting in the back of the bus to separate water fountains.

A new student began his or her journey at the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech by bringing in a poem, which harkens back to his foundational training with Helen Espie. Additionally, within African American literature and theatre, poetry and rhythm have a particular musicality. Notably, in the first AUDLECO office on Lenox Avenue, Vivian Robinson, president, featured a Langston Hughes poem:

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\text{But somebody somebody’ll stand up and talk about me and write about me – I reckon it’ll be}
\]

\(^{151}\) Ibid., 23.
me myself
yes, It’ll be me.152

McClintock used poems as vehicles for students to gain a command of language, make clear choices with little context, and fill out a narrative with their imagination. He also used it as an assessment tool to see how well one could memorize lines, an actor’s comfort on stage, and the freedom of an actor’s body. In the Harlem years, the students chose classic poetry and Langston Hughes was often the poet of choice.

The next step, known as “achieving freedom” focused on physical and mental relaxation and trust within the ensemble.153 A class known as “Stretching Out” laid the groundwork for beginner actors to become more comfortable in their bodies, and more trusting of their peers and also provided a sense of becoming spiritually and mentally free in a space that accepted their Black identity outside of the White hegemonic everyday world.

Stretching out is similar to the Actors’ Studio “Relaxation,” however the main difference is the group dynamic versus the isolation of the Method-based exercise. In my own training at the Actor Studio Drama School as a White actor, a main tenet in all acting, voice, and movement classes is “relaxation is a fundamental skill of the Stanislavski actor.”154 In that mantra, the emphasis is on the Stanislavski actor, which McClintock’s system avoids. For the Method-trained actor, each student in Basic Technique in the first six weeks spends hours

152 “AUDELCO – Yes, It’ll Be Me,” Black Masks 1, no. 2, October 1984.
153 Mitchell, interview.
on the floor achieving maximum relaxation in isolation, with eyes closed. When the actor feels tension in the body or a distraction from concentration, they are meant to give a “full sound” or a guttural moan. A distraction most often meant hearing another student phonate a full sound and so there is a chain effect. Through this full sound, the actor releases tension and returns to breath work, which eventually moves on to sense memory work.

Similarly, McClintock wrote that “relaxation, both physically and mentally is key” to approaching a character; however, it is not just a solitary exercise and the group dynamic is meant to be embraced, and as opposed to the Actors Studio, other actors sounds are understood as taking you outside of your own relaxation.155 As Greta Walker, journalist from the New Yorker observed when she audited McClintock’s class, she witnessed in stretching out “one student at a time rolled over a prone line of other students lying side by side brought forth a chorus of giggles and groans.”156 In Stretching Out, the students engaged in tension and release (similar to the Actors Studio relaxation), but as Walker describes, as the session progressed and the teacher and pupils became more relaxed “the final exercises involved a great deal of spontaneity,” certainly reminiscent of a jazz ensemble.157

Another similarity with Method-based training is the inclusion of animal work, however for McClintock animal exercises were part of a warm up, whereas for Actors Studio training, animal work is taught as an approach to base character

156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
on. The most well known example is Marlon Brando in *Streetcar Named Desire* who based his character, Stanley Kowalski, on a gorilla. In Stretching Out, actors engaged in animal exercises to promote childlike curiosity, but not on the basis of character. Presumably, using animals as a basis of character for a group of people who are viewed stereotypically as brutes, primal, and savage-like would not be constructive for character creation. Even in 2017, these harmful stereotypes pervade society when, for example, Michelle Obama was referred to as “an ape in heels.”

Other exercises in Stretching Out included exercises to build a dynamic ensemble. This included trusting exercises such as standing up and falling into another actor’s arms, rolling on the ground on top of one another to be okay with others in your personal space, and in the most extreme case, taking off all your clothes and walking around the room. The students that experienced the nude exercise contend that the objective was not sexual or lewd; rather it was the willingness to be totally free. Suavae Mitchell said, “In the beginning, a part of the work was to get you to be free. Just to be relaxed, to loosen up, and not to be afraid or concerned of how people saw you. The notion of being if you are hung up on that, you can’t be free to perform, you can’t be creative, you can’t relax because you are hung up on how people perceive you.”

This notion of losing self-conscious in the African American context relates back to the concept of the

159 Mitchell, interview.
160 Ibid.
Studio as a healing place because for many of the actors, the White gaze and the White hegemony devalued their lives since birth.

McClintock built the acting classes on a clear trajectory of layering in aspects of character. A strong belief was that an actor must not be 100% involved in the character because otherwise an actor will forget his or her identity on the stage. After feeling comfortable with one’s body and one’s presence on the stage, an actor must maintain that awareness. Therefore, an actor must be involved 99% in the character, leaving 1% to remember that he or she is an actor on the stage. Woody Carter remarked, “Over the course of our learning we would know what it meant to do for our character so that the credibility of you are and who you are portraying is there.”\textsuperscript{161} The approach avoided stirring up emotion because emotions are understood as a byproduct of the work, not the goal. All humans are emotional beings thus there is no need to fabricate feelings for the sake of drama. For McClintock and his actors, the preparation work necessitates creating detailed layers of character, and acting is doing, not feeling, a similar desired outcome to Sanford Meisner’s technique.

In Basic Acting Technique class, McClintock started with simple exercises then progressed to a sequence of activities. These simple exercises, for example lifting a cup and walking from one side of the stage to another were discreet and independent.\textsuperscript{162} The actor would then lift the cup in three different ways, as three different people. The class, including McClintock, would critique the student regarding authenticity and simple truth. The critique honed in on if the actor was

\textsuperscript{161} Woody Carter, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 29, 2015.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
99% focused and committed to that simple activity. If the actor seemed only 40% involved in the activity, they would repeat that simple action, lifting the cup, until achieving maximum concentration. The actor would then put together a sequence of events. Once an actor understood the process of creating activities and the level of concentration and focus, he or she could begin to build character from a mentally and physically relaxed, yet prepared body. For example, Jerome Preston Bates recalls his work on Ntozake Shange’s *spell no. 7*, which he remembers as, more than “putting on a play, it was putting life on stage, living it and eating it.”

The constant exchange of energy between actors and ensemble work starts with the activities because as McClintock said, in life, we are all constantly in motion.163

Ernie McClintock emphasized to his students that the job of the actor is to go out in the world and observe humankind, an exercise similar to one in the Actors Studio Drama School. At the Actors Studio, my teacher and mentor Barbara Poitier (niece of Sydney Poitier) instructed us to sit in a public place (subway, park bench, etc.) and observe a stranger, taking note of three repeated gestures we observed. In class, in silence, we would repeat this physicality for about five minutes and then the class would guess our character’s age, gender, and relationship to the world. I find this exercise useful, but with the nuance of McClintock’s technique to say we are performing the authenticity of a person’s gender, or race for that matter, could potentially perpetuate stereotypes if used irresponsibly. For Lola Loui, she observed homeless people to construct her

devised character in Derek Walcott’s *Dream on Monkey Mountain* in the street observing regular citizens in the Harlem community. She describes the character as “fishing through things and looking at people,” but constantly in motion.164

McClintock’s approach was not based on observing a single stranger, but many strangers and collecting idiosyncrasies to augment the creation of a character, even if that given activity seemed antithetical to the character. For example, Jerome Preston Bates recalls playing Boy in *Tabernacle* on roller skates. Gwendolen Hardwick still uses this principle in her teaching today. She said “You have to go out and observe the human condition; [Ernie] really appreciated the unique things that you brought to the stage. And that came from the observations … It’s really about studying the human body. And everything is your classroom so to speak, and the extent to which you take that on stage when it’s needed for a particular character will make all the difference.”165 Through these observations and without speaking, one can convey a specific character to the audience. The more detailed the student enacted their observation, the clearer the observed became to the class.

Character Analysis is the detailed work that an actor does before the first rehearsal because including the character’s history as well as the relationships with the other characters. In relationship to Lola Loui’s devised character in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, she recalls that even for that character building, she read the script at least three times, thought about the character’s mannerisms, and thought about the character in terms of all that was not in the script including

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164 Lola Loui, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 2, 2015.
165 Ibid.
character bio and relationships to the other characters in Walcott’s script. Ernie McClintock often evoked the words of Ron Milner, which all of his actors, even the Richmond company, proclaim in unison to this day: “Details! Details should be moving around those stages in all kinds of explicit images…” Details were of the utmost importance in Character Analysis because they gave the actors the opportunity to both imbue their characters with life and give them options to improvise within any given rehearsal or performance. Many of McClintock’s protégés turned teachers utilize this analysis for their students including Suavae Mitchell, Bolanyle Edwards, Gwendolen Hardwick, DL Hopkins, Levy Lee Simon, and Derome Smith. The purpose of developing the character in this way is to equip the actor with tools to communicate detailed information about one’s character to the audience.

In Character Analysis, the actor begins with the script, which is the foundation of approaching a play, and asks the basic first question, “Who Am I?” Prior to understanding the intricacies of how jazz is applied to the technique, one must start at the basic level of the script. McClintock likens the text on the page to the melody in a jazz piece, in other words, the notes on the page are the words in the script. To answer “Who Am I?” the actor collects information from the script for a general sense of the character, according to the playwright as well as through interactions with the other characters. However, there is often little

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166 Ron Milner is a significant playwright of the Black Arts Movement. One of his most popular plays *Who’s Got His Own* was produced at the major Black theatre companies in the 60s and 70s including the New Lafayette Theatre, The 127th Street Repertory Ensemble, Negro Ensemble Company, and the New Federal Theatre. He is also known for his play “Checkmates” which starred Denzel Washington and Paul Winfield in 1988. McClintock, “Perspective on Black Acting,” 80.
information detailing who the character is, and in particular “providing an in-depth description providing a personal history from birth to the present.”

Helmar Cooper notes that the onus was on the actors to come up with the answers, he insisted on the actors making their own discoveries. Before the actor can use his or her imagination, there must be an in-depth analysis of the character in the context of the play.

In the first step of “Who Am I?” there are three categories: The information list, the character’s rhythm, and the character’s center. The information list should provide the actor with all the things he or she wants to reveal to the audience. This can include a “little secret” that the actor/character knows that his fellow actors do not. This information is not provided by the script; but is more so about idiosyncrasies, habits and actions such as nervousness, smoking, eating, ticks, and so forth. However, these detailed attributes should never detract from the integrity of the story or the script.

The Character’s Rhythm is the second component of “Who Am I?” where the actor chooses the speed and tempo that is unique to that character. McClintock wrote “For most Black people, music is the most significant part of their existence. Music is so much a part of the Black experience that it cannot be deleted in a Black theatrical production.” In McClintock’s production of Shango de Ima, Jerome Preston Bates recalls studying Yoruban culture and the importance of vocal presence, as well as the movement and dance that

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167 Al Suavae Mitchel, “Character Analysis” (lecture notes, August 2015).
168 Ibid.
169 McClintock, “Perspective on Black Acting,” 84.
McClintock demanded in “every molecule of his body.” This does not only include the physical speed and tempo of the body, but also the character’s vocal cadence, speed, and rhythm, all inspired by the script and manifested by the actor’s imagination. For McClintock’s production of Paul Carter Harrison’s *Tabernacle*, a play about a culture of pigeons in New York and a nest above their homes to feed pigeons, he brought in Thom Foster, a voice teacher, to give singing lessons to the cast. Music was present in all his productions, but these lessons from Foster aided the cast in finding their own character’s distinct physical and vocal tempo. In White training programs, vocal training is part of the curriculum, but the application of speed and rhythm are not principles of acting classes. Perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of McClintock’s Jazz Acting is the synthesis between all the courses, or as Gregory Wallace articulates “the marriage of body and speech.”

The last aspect of “Who am I?” focuses on the Character’s Center. The Center is “the place from whence the character lives.” This can be a part of the actor’s body, but it also can suggest the individual manner he or she interacts with his or her own space. McClintock often used John Wayne’s swagger as an example of the Character’s Center. His swagger is so distinct that his center might be his arms and/or upper torso, not necessarily one part of the body.

When I asked Bolanyle Edwards about her role as the apparition in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, she postured her body as if the apparition’s center emanated

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170 Bates, interview.
171 Gregory Wallace, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 16, 2015.
172 Mitchell, interview.
173 Ibid.
from her chest. She said, “I was ethereal and spooky and weird. I loved that role. I walked on the catwalk all dressed in White and float back.”

Through the actor creating a detailed physical and internal life of the character, he or she can now move on to the relationships in the script.

The most fundamental question for the actor to consider in text analysis is “Why am I saying these words?” It is important to honor the playwright’s work and the actor must justify every word, sentence, and punctuation because the text is the basis of the character and the play. “It is of the utmost importance to know exactly why certain words are being said… what is motivating your character to say what is being said in the conversation.”

The difference with other techniques such as David Mamet’s Practical Aesthetics, and even Method Training, is that they instruct pupils to allow for spontaneity in order to not promote line readings, or overly rehearsed delivery. With McClintock, that part of the jazz ensemble melody is a disciplined and thorough understanding of the script, or the melody. Gregory Wallace recalls that in preparation for his work on Equus and Dream on Monkey Mountain, the company would go to Sylvia’s Café in Harlem and do poetry readings, and an evening of Langston Hughes to hear and breathe with the language.

Through this exhaustive character creation and thorough understanding of the language, the actor can then riff in performance.

Once the actor is clear on the physical and expressive make up as well as the relationships in the unit, he or she needs to consider step four; “Where Am I

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175 Mitchell, interview.
176 Wallace, interview.
and What are my environmental circumstances?” The environment does not suggest a mere portrayal of the physical surroundings of the place, as in many traditional techniques such as Lee Strasberg’s Method. In Strasberg’s Method, actors use sense memory, or accessing the five senses to recreate a person, place, or object, to access character and ignite the relationship between actors on stage. For example, if an actor is playing Desdemona, and realizes that the handkerchief that Othello gave her is missing, she can substitute that handkerchief for an object from her real life such as a keepsake of great importance. Actors create environment in the same way; therefore, if an actor is working on a scene that takes place in a character’s bedroom, she can work on sensorally creating her own bedroom filled with objects, smells, windows, and so forth. In Jazz Acting, it is more connected to the actors’ relationship with the environment and bringing objects or activities on stage, rather than miming exercises to connect with the character. In Dream on Monkey Mountain, Loui’s role, which she refers to as “my greatest role,” she was constantly moving about the stage pursuing activities such as sorting through the trash and eating a rotten banana in the middle of a performance.

For McClintock’s actors, the goal is to identify “the location and environmental conditions are [important] in relation to how one acts and responds to he other individuals.” The location and environment informs the idiosyncrasies; perhaps the character’s rhythm increases due to cold weather for

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177 Sense Memory is a technique from Lee Strasberg which asks the actor to use all of his or her sense to recreate a person, place or object from his or her own life to connect with the circumstances of the character and the play.

178 Mitchell, interview.
example, and can even suggest to the audience how comfortable or uncomfortable that character feels in that scene, with those specific people, given the particulars of an environment. The environmental circumstances require the actor to consider his or her body in that space, and to physically embody the impact of those surroundings, which relates to Strasberg’s goal for actors to live fully in their space on stage.

Once the actor establishes how the character would behave in these circumstances, in relationship to other characters, the actor must ask, “What would I be doing if I were the character in this situation?” This question helps to logically justify the actions of the character, but also the actor can draw on activities, gestures, and habits in the given circumstances of the scene. “One must imagine himself in the position of his character, and list a number of things he might do to bring a part of himself to the character.”179 This aspect of the technique is what separates it from popular character-based techniques such as Stella Adler’s.180 This question allows the actor to stay grounded and keep that 1% of him or herself on stage.

The final step of the Character Analysis answers the question “What is my objective and what am I willing to do to achieve it?” Just as the actor is fully committed to the activities, as far as concentration and focus, the actor must be at all times fully aware of his or her objective.181 The actor should write out the objectives for each unit and the means to achieve that objective, to enforce the

179 Ibid.
180 Stella Adler, acting teacher, based her technique on the actor’s imagination to create character. There is less of an emphasis on the actor’s own experience and more on creativity.
181 Ibid.
performance. The actor may not achieve the objective. The objective statement is “I want to _____ (to whom or to what) in order to (words that I choose to define).” Depending on a given performance or rehearsal, the outcome can change based on the actor’s scene partner. The fully realized Character Analysis prepares the actor to adjust or riff in the moment, staying truthful to the script, concentrated on the activities and objectives, and fully embodied as the character with an acute awareness that this is indeed a performance.

In relation to praxis and theory, McClintock’s Character Analysis and technique overall fulfills Amiri Baraka’s call for artists to represent Black people truthfully as a means of liberation and community unity. Baraka said:

The reason we spoke of Black Arts was to get Black Artists, whether they were cooks or poets or tailors or singers or jazz musicians or athletes or actors, computer technicians or dancers or politicians, to tell about Black people truthfully, and not only tell them about themselves and their oppressors like they actually were, but also, hopefully, to provide some indication of what we, as a people, had to do to free ourselves, to rebuild our communities and restore our people to their traditional greatness.

For McClintock, Black performers were unable to achieve this philosophy because of a deficit in formal training in the 1960s, where many of his students were enrolled in universities, but also trained with the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech: “…the problem they had was that they were getting their degree requirements but didn’t feel like they were getting any theatre experience that meant anything to them so they came here and went to school.”

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182 Derome Smith, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 9, 2015.
183 McClintock, “Perspective on Black Acting,” 80.
184 McClintock, interview.
Additionally, as a spectator in the theatre he believed that in general, there was a lack of quality training for black and White actors. He said, "In performance after performance, one can witness actors who leave their character portrayals to chance. Others rely on a small reservoir of gimmicks picked up from miscellaneous theater workshops." His detail-oriented approach, the Black theatre history courses, movement classes ranging from Sudanese rituals to contemporary African dance, and the rigorous voice and speech curriculum provided a conduit to achieve Baraka’s vision of the Black theatre as a place of self-discovery, liberation, rebuilding community, and Black pride. However, because his work was rooted in the Black Arts Movement under the auspices of the Black Power Movement, McClintock was motivated to establish a technique for his people, to represent the diversity of Black experiences. This detail-oriented approach, in line with the Black Arts philosophy, avoided producing broad strokes of character and stereotypes, but rather highly personalized, grounded, and recognizable characters for audiences.

**Curriculum and Content**

In a 1971 brochure for the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech, courses are offered for beginners and intermediate/advanced students, and also workshops in which the school invites each student to use his or her own experience to portray Black characters as well as learn a "great deal about
themselves” with regards to Black history and culture. All 17 courses listed in the brochure were required for each student. At the advanced level, students who are cast in productions rehearsed for productions in addition to their coursework. Due to limited access to the particulars of certain courses, and given that many of the teachers have passed on, I will focus on two areas based on the core of the curriculum: Black theatre history, and culture and acting.

The structure of the program included rigorous study, discipline, and absolute commitment to the craft. McClintock expected his students to take the vocation of theatre as seriously as he did, with a religious fervor. Bolanyle Edwards recalls the devotion and commitment instilled in her. When she was the stage manager for Baraka’s Madheart, she had surgery on both of her feet but walked up six flights of stairs for the performance. On stage, when Edwards was cast in Shango de Ima, she broke her ribs after a bike accident the day before opening. “But I went that next day and I was on that stage. It was my dedication; you had to be there and you had to do it.” The basic actor training consisted of four to six terms at ten weeks each. The schedule was as follows:

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186 Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech” Brochure, 1971. Private Collection of Elizabeth Cizmar. Courses include Acting Projects, Audition Preparatory, Black Theatre History, Conga Drum, Dance Workshop, Karate, Movement, Poetry Theatre, Rehearsal and Performance, Scene Study, Speech, Stretching Out, Swahili, Visual Communication, Vocal Technique, Vocal Workshop and Yoga. All of the interviewees confirmed that all of these courses were required at some point in their training.
187 Bolanyle Edwards, interview.
188 Ibid.
McClintock required students to attend every class, whether a loved one had passed away, someone was ill, or a blizzard hit New York City. For example, Woody Carter, student turned teacher, recalled a blizzard in 1971 when he was cast in N. R. Davidson’s *El Hajj Malik (The Dramatic Life and Death of Malcolm X)* (1971) and the city suspended public transportation. In New York City, public transportation rarely shuts down even in snowstorms, thus the blizzard must have been quite severe. He walked to the theatre in order to make rehearsal because McClintock was “very clear, there was no missing whatsoever.”

Whether one had rehearsal or acting class, McClintock did not tolerate lateness or absences and expected all his students to be prepared to work.

As far as curriculum, Marc Primus (and later his student Gwendolen Hardwick circa 1972) led the Black theater history course and based his teaching on what he calls “democratic history.” When Primus uses the term democratic

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189 Carter, interview.
history he refers to it as an alternative to traditional American historical texts, such as Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen’s *A Patriot’s History of the United States*. He said that his teaching is more along the lines of the activist, scholar Howard Zinn. The foundational texts he used to offset those traditional texts include Nathan Huggins’ *Black Odyssey: The African-American Ordeal in Slavery*, Mitchell Loften’s *Black Drama*, and articles by Orlando Patterson. He also integrated his own exercise known as historio-drama, where actors performed roles of historical figures. Notably, Marc Primus’s historio-drama predates Lin Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton* in terms of actors of color portraying a range of historical figures.

Primus contends that in order for the students to heal, they had to understand the pride of where they came from, and establish a sense of self. He said that an actor must value himself or herself in order to create character. These courses were essential to many of the students who had little to no education on their ancestral past and its profound connection to the present. This differs from institutions such as New York University, which Gwendolen Hardwick attended after working with McClintock, and where there were only four women in her cohort. She said that in her time at NYU the teachers did not perform any work by Black authors and “they didn’t know what to do with us.”

She said that McClintock and Primus challenged her to believe in herself and from that clear sense of self at NYU, she had the confidence to insist that the school hire Black

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190 Howard Zinn, an activist, historian and playwright, was a self-described democratic socialist and was an ally in the civil rights movement as well as an anti-war advocate.

191 Primus, interview.
director Glenda Dickerson, as opposed to the Russian director they had hired to
direct *The Cherry Orchard*. She said she was not going to do *The Cherry
Orchard* and so the four women in collaboration with Glenda Dickerson adapted
the Greek tragedy *Atrius Egyptus*.

Marc Primus began his courses with Nathan Huggins’ *Black Odyssey: The African-American Ordeal in Slavery*, a book that he considers to be the best
general Black history because it does not commence with enslavement in
America, but rather, with Africans in their native land. The physical torture
and death experienced in the Middle Passage is part of the genocide. Huggins
also highlights the capture and objectification of African bodies as not just an
individual offense. Rather, an entire African village was mutilated, whether or
not a whole community was captured. In the introduction he states that the
book “focuses on the emotional and spiritual essence of their experience; to evoke
what I believe to have been the psychological and spiritual sense of order and
place that was destroyed by the slave trade.”

The enlightening point of view captures the reality that the tragedy of the Middle Passage included not just
horrific brutality and violence towards the enslaved, but that the slave trade
altered an entire framework of life- those left in Africa and those who faced the
Middle Passage.

Huggins analysis of how Afro-Americans translated their African roots in
America connects directly to a McClintock interview conducted by Rhett Jones in

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192 Ibid.
193 Ibid.
195 Ibid.
1981. In the final chapter of his book, Huggins states, “The making of the Afro-
American people was a process of blending the old with the new, changing the
old into something that was new and that could survive a world in the making.”197
For example, Christianity became a spiritual base for many slaves even though
they converted from their indigenous religions. They adapted their spiritual
reality to Christianity by adding an African texture.198 So there is a negotiation of
the old and the new and in the 1960s an effort to define what Blackness is.
McClintock took this notion even a step further by calling on the intellectual
James Baldwin who said “…the artists has the responsibility not only to redefine
himself in relation to his culture, but to redefine the culture which has created
him.”199 However, before one can redefine a culture, one must understand the
oppression and the history. Huggins traces the journey of Africans to the New
World where human beings were dehumanized and tortured, yet somehow their
cultural spirit survived and those in the African diaspora created a community that
traced back to their African roots.

The concept of a close-knit community within the African American
experience came up repeatedly in interviews with McClintock’s former students.
Part of being a member of the school or the company included putting time into
cleaning the studio spaces, hanging lights, calling cues, and keeping watch to
protect the space from intruders. Suavae Mitchell recalls:

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197 Ibid., 203.
198 Ibid., 70.
One time we got a new facility, and we all had to take care of it together. I remember one night, someone broke into the place. So the actors had to be on duty- I had a shift from midnight to 8am. I thought “what the hell am I doing? I didn’t sign up for this!” But you know he was talking about commitment, so back in the day it wasn’t just about you show up, you take a class you go away and hopefully you get cast in a play. No we are all in this together. We all move together.  

Ego had no place in McClintock’s theatre. Gwendolen Hardwick added that through the community of artists working together to scrub floors and hang lights, McClintock ensured that all the actors had an appreciation for the totality of theatre. This sense of reliance and respect for one another nourished the chemistry of the ensemble on and off stage. As many have mentioned, including Marc Primus, Suavae Mitchell, and Bolanyle Edwards, the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech and the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble resembled a family, and Ernie was the father, just like the patriarch of a village community. Therefore, even the day-to-day understanding of company operations connected back to African roots in community.

**Conclusion**

In the early days of the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech, McClintock mounted “Advanced Workshop” productions, and in 1973, with the formation of the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble and the subsequent Harlem Jazz Theatre established in 1986, actors outside the Studio could audition and be accepted as members of the company. A paradigm shift that takes place in Richmond in 1991 begins to take shape. This shift is what Monica White Ndounou refers to as OJT, or On-the-Job-Training. Self-defining and healing

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200 Mitchell, interview.
remained foundational in the rehearsal room and in performance. Among the artists were Jerome Preston Bates, Gregory Wallace, Tupac Shakur, Levy Lee Simon, and Lola Louis. In the 1970s, as the Black Nationalists shifted consciousness to the African Diaspora, so too did the content of the repertory season. With McClintock, the technique responded to the political and social context of the times, and therefore the technique is in a constant state of self-definition in relationship to the local and global community. The actors continued to connect to the collective and historical memory of the African diaspora, and nurtured the individual self-expression of each artist.

This shift of consciousness was seen in McClintock’s productions that emanated from his technique in the early 1960s and kept up with the times and current issues such as the South African anti-apartheid movement. For example, in 1978, the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble performed at the Harlem Performance Center located on 239 7th Avenue at 138th Street. The productions included Richard Wesley’s *The Sirens* (1974), Lonnie Elder III’s *Ceremonies in Dark Old Men* (1969), Joseph Walker’s *The River Niger* (1973), and John Kani, Winston Ntshona, and Athol Fugard’s *The Island* (1974). The repertory season was inclusive of Richard Wesley, a writer known for addressing issues of the Black urban community, and Athol Fugard, a White South African activist who exposed his country’s racial segregation and discrimination against Black South Africans.

In 1981 with the election of Ronald Reagan, both the NEA (National Endowment for the Arts) and EAD (Expansion Arts Division) lost substantial
funding, yet McClintock’s company continued despite the disbanding of the Black Theatre Alliance. EAD cut from the NEA – which was the expansion arts division and responsible. The Black Theatre Alliance had received financial support from the CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) so much so that half of their 475K budgets in 1979 came from this arm of the NEA/EAD.201 The Afro-American Studio closed its doors in 1986 but the legacy of this work and training lived on in the Harlem Jazz Theatre, and in touring productions in Chicago, Boston, and Cleveland. McClintock brought his acting theory to Richmond and further developed the technique under the “Jazz Acting Technique: A Common Sense Approach.”

CHAPTER TWO

“On-the-Job-Training”: Common Sense Acting in Richmond

When Ernie McClintock and Ronald Walker, his life partner and co-collaborator, left New York in 1991, they sought change due to a sharp decline of funding for Black theatres, and the devastation of fifty-seven company members and friends dying from the AIDS epidemic. The couple wanted to settle in a new town and pursue art with a new group of young, driven actors. They initially went to Atlanta due to an already established theatre community where McClintock had many connections. However, the tight-knit clique of theatre artists were not accepting of outsiders like McClintock and Walker. The couple left discouraged but surprisingly ended up in Richmond, the capital of the confederacy, with a 60% Black population, yet a town with a major deficit of Black theatre.

Geno Brantley explains that Richmond received McClintock and Walker with open arms, but not without programming challenges. McClintock said “It was extremely difficult because it is something new. In the last ten years, Black theater has not been traditional in Richmond… except for professional theater. There are some White theaters that do major Black productions a few times per

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202 Primus, interview.
204 DL Hopkins, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 18, 2015
year, but there is little more than that.” At this unlikely location, McClintock indeed filled a void not just in terms of productions, but also in terms of acting technique for young, eager Black actors in a town with a history of racial divide. Ernie McClintock introduced his approach, which was inclusive of an Afrocentric worldview, a resistance to mainstream theatre, and a commitment to community in Richmond during the 1990s. His theory and technique continued to develop in the tradition of Jazz Aesthetics, bringing to fruition Jazz Actors Technique: A Common Sense Approach to Acting, a model of OJT, which lives in perpetuity.

McClintock’s Common Sense philosophy remained consistent throughout his forty-plus year career, and he developed the Jazz Actors Technique: The Common Sense Approach to Acting in the midst of logistical challenges, and the context of Reaganomics. He shifted the structure from the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech because the faculty he worked with in New York pursued other interests. Therefore his classroom in Richmond focused more on productions. In total, between the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech, the 127th Street Lab, the Harlem Jazz Theatre, and the Jazz Actors Theatre, McClintock and Walker produced over one hundred fifty shows. I have yet to find a distinction between the Harlem Jazz Theatre and earlier iterations of McClintock’s school and company; however, presumably due to the sharp decline of funding in the arts, I suspect McClintock made an effort to reinvent his company as the “Harlem Jazz Theatre.” Even just in name, the establishment of

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205 Mrodriguez, “Black theater finds a voice in Richmond at the second annual Black Theatre Festival,” 5.
206 Ernie McClintock’s Resume, Library of Virginia Archive.
this company in 1986 shows McClintock’s development towards a distinct Jazz Aesthetic.

Marginalized theatre companies who change the theatrical and social landscape of a community continue to be under studied. Other theatre companies include Harry Justin Elam Jr.’s research on El Teatro Campesino, Edmond Melhem’s and Hyecun Ceon’s scholarship on Young Jean Lee Theatre Company, and the current studies and performances of the Al-Madina Theatre in Beirut. Although the Jazz Actors Theatre in name is disbanded, the work of his predecessors in Richmond lives on in the African American Repertory Theatre of Virginia, and deserves further exploration. McClintock’s company and technique in Richmond highlights professional theatres outside the mainstream Great White Way. The Jazz Actors Theatre thrived and told stories of Black Americans lived experiences, employed young actors, and educated their community through the arts. Scholars, practitioners, and audiences should consider companies beyond New York-centric context so that federal and private funding will increase support for social programming for the arts.

This chapter places archival research on productions and documents from the Jazz Actors Theatre at the Library of Virginia, analysis of McClintock’s unorthodox productions in conversation with the work of William Chafe, Thomas L. Long, Adam M. Geary, Monica White Ndounou, Sharon Bridgforth, and Omi Osun Jones. Reviews of current and past shows, extensive interviews with Jazz Actors who are living today and the elders from the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech, and secondary research on the development of Common Sense
Acting to the Jazz Actors Technique: A Common Sense Approach to Acting, helps demonstrate the influence and legacy of Ernie McClintock and Ronald Walker. They changed the theatrical landscape of Richmond by their presence, leadership, and unorthodox approach to teaching and creating theatre. Through tracing the evolution of the technique and the development of McClintock’s OJT training, I will demonstrate the efficacy of the technique, as well as the positive influence of the Black Arts Movement well beyond the 1960s and 1970s.

Reaganomics, Economic Devastation, and the AIDS Epidemic

Prior to McClintock and Walker moving to Richmond, American society became subject to Reaganomics, which some argue was a time of great prosperity. But for African Americans, sects of society from lower socioeconomic classes, and those in the arts, this federally sanctioned economic structure proved to be devastating. The social programs and artistic initiatives funded by the government in the 1960s and 1970s provided optimism and support. With Reaganomics in full swing by 1991, the country had suffered racial polarization, brutal unjust wars, and massive civil unrest. With changes to the economic policy, a massive decrease in funding for the arts, and the AIDS epidemic taking the lives of so many of McClintock’s company members who were in effect family members, McClintock and Walker made a pilgrimage to the south.

From a theoretical point of view, the Reagan administration’s conservative political philosophy diametrically opposed the principles of McClintock’s Afrocentricity, which is centered on the collective whole. Reagan’s philosophy

207 Chafe, “The Unfinished Journey,” 481.
was centered on the individual’s aggressive drive for success as a conduit for economic success. This hyper individualistic mentality contrasts with funding for programs from the government. Political historian William Chafe notes, “The American spirit of individualism, competition, and personal pride would be restored, and with the shackles of government bureaucracy removed, individual citizens would once again be liberated to maximize their abilities and aspirations.”208 However, this individualistic approach assumes that all Americans are on an equal playing field. The Civil Rights and Black Power Movement exposed inequities in America according to class and race. In the 1960s, social programs expanded rapidly, benefited the economy, and through support in social programs including the arts, theatre became a prominent aspect of the Black Arts Movement.209

In particular, the Reagan administration’s replacement of the CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act program) with Job Training bills impacted funding to the Black Theatre Alliance, which a host of theatres were part of including the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech, the Afro-American Singing Theatre, the Bed-Stuy Theatre, the Brownsville Lab Theatre, the New Heritage Repertory Theatre, the Afro-American Total Theatre, and Theatre Black.210 During the first month of the Reagan administration, changes were swiftly made to CETA: “The Reagan Administration, which has cut CETA's funds by a third for the current fiscal year and has terminated its public

208 Ibid.
209 Ibid., 459.
210 Williams, Black Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s.
works section, says it wants to continue job training for disadvantaged youths next year.”

The intention was to integrate job training for youth, but the result was the reduction of governmental financing for social programs, which fell in line with Reagan’s overall goals:

Reagan … delivered on his pledge to combat the social philosophy, programs, and regulations … Although affirmative action had produced significant gains for both Blacks and women, Reagan ordered his attorney general to fight such programs in the federal courts, and packed the Civil Rights Commission and EEOC with individuals dedicated to reversing the racial policies of previous administrations. Reagan slashed food stamp benefits, eliminated 300,000 CETA jobs, cut AFDC funds and lowered the benefits of an additional 3000,000 families receiving welfare assistance.212

Therefore, aside from the slashed government funding of the BTA, the surrounding community in Harlem experienced an abrupt change in progress for social programing. Furthermore, African Americans’ income largely declined and poverty increased.213 African Americans living in urban centers such as Harlem and Newark presumably could not focus on their collective whole because individually, many fell below the poverty line.

In addition to the Reagan administration abandoning those in the lower and middle classes, the president’s lack of acknowledgement of the AIDS epidemic until 1986 also solidified his abandonment of those in urban centers who did not have access to healthcare and were cast off as the underbelly of society.214 Initially, AIDS was known as GRID, or the Gay-Related Immune Deficiency, which stigmatized gay men in all communities. Furthermore, although in the

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213 Ibid., 461.
1990s there were developments in treatment, Black men and women did not benefit from these advances due to their lack of financial resources, and that “…Blacks remained relatively invisible objects of public concern and government health programs.”\textsuperscript{215} As recent as 2014, studies have concluded that nearly 46% of those infected with HIV are of the Black community.\textsuperscript{216} McClintock and Walker’s Harlem community were subject to this deadly disease and due to the economic downturn for African Americans and the onset of the AIDS epidemic, they left Harlem, and in Richmond discovered a new community of young actors to benefit from their innovative approach; however, they did not forget their Harlem roots or connections, and created an extended Jazz Actors Family, still in tact today.

**McClintock’s Afrocentric Approach Speaks to the Richmond Community**

When Ernie McClintock and Ronald Walker established the Jazz Actors Theatre in 1991, the New York-based director’s theoretical foundation had persisted beyond the period considered the Black Arts Movement. In studies on the Black Arts Movement/Black Theatre Movement, when the federal funding and grants were halted and the Black Theatre Alliance dismantled, the assumption was that the movement had ended. However, given the continued success of Barbara Ann Teer’s National Black Theatre, Woodie King Jr.’s New Federal Theatre, and Ernie McClintock’s Harlem Jazz Theatre and subsequent Jazz Actors Theatre, the work continued. McClintock’s mission to subvert the mainstream

\textsuperscript{215} Chafe, “The Unfinished Journey,” 522.
theatre, his efforts to create theatre from an Afrocentric perspective, and connect to any given community from 1960s Harlem to 1990s Richmond, demonstrates how his technique and productions serve the diverse make up of African Americans across the United States.

The production season and processes of the Jazz Actors Theatre were under McClintock’s complete supervision; self-determination was put into practice, in order to avoid negotiating his work and the influence of popular opinion or programming, situated in Richmond’s theatrical landscape, run by White producers and directors. McClintock refused an administrative board to choose the plays, productions, or make financial decisions. In fact, some may refer to him as a tyrannical artistic director. However, Iman Shabazz, actor and current artistic producer of the African American Redemptory Theatre of Virginia, asserts that in order for McClintock to engage with nonmainstream Black stories and encourage a political education, the influence of others would cloud or even alter his agenda. Shabazz theorized that Ernie’s complete control of the Jazz Actors Theatre related to the bigger picture of Black theatre and the progression of African Continuum:

What I believe (Ernie didn’t state this to me) is that it was very clear [to create] a space in terms of connecting us to the world was a lot more of telling stories that people were familiar with. … Continu[ing] the process of political education if you will. When you have a theatre community with the excellence are stories of White stories, White relationships… It robs a people of understanding their connection to that culture and history. And it in a sense erases that culture in that history.217

217 Iman Shabazz, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 18, 2015.
Shabazz’s articulation regarding the ramifications of potentially robbing African Americans of history and culture, and being submerged in solely White stories, or even Black characters written as a stereotype from a White perspective, underlines the need of a separatist Black theatre. The mainstream theatre may retort that “multiracial” or “all Black” versions of “classics” such as the 2012 revival of Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire* creates an inclusive theatrical environment. However, these stories do not emanate from an Afrocentric perspective. Therefore, the impetus for creating all-Black institutions is critical to educating a community centered in Black history and storytelling, and then to a wider audience. McClintock taught his students to determine their own paths in terms of what they chose to engage with, and what they shared with the rest of the world.

![Jazz Actors Theatre](image)

**Figure 3:** Jazz Actors Theatre.

*Source:* From the Private Collection of Al Suavae Mitchell.

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An early example of self-determination and challenging Richmond’s status quo is exemplified by McClintock’s production of Jean Genet’s *The Blacks: A Clown Show* (1958). Prior to the 1993 productions of *The Blacks*, McClintock had not mounted Genet’s absurdist play in New York. The plot of Genet’s controversial play tells the story of thirteen Black actors who put the White Queen on trial with the intention of exploring stereotypes. In the preface of the play, Genet writes, the play “…is intended for a White audience, but if, which is unlikely, it is ever performed before a Black audience, then a White person, male or female, should be invited every evening… But if no White person accepted? Then let white masks be distributed to the black spectators as they enter the theater. And if the Blacks refuse the masks, then let a dummy be used.”

As scholar Mance Williams notes, although Genet’s play challenges minstrelsy and racial discrimination, the question of stereotypes was already in society’s consciousness. I speculate that due to McClintock’s focus on Black writers in the 1960s and 1970s, and the particular make up of his students, he excluded *The Blacks* from his repertoire until 1993.

There were two performances of *The Blacks*, both in unconventional spaces; one in a tent outside the Virginia Commonwealth University’s Performing Arts Center and a performance of protest outside the Altria Theatre, Richmond’s Landmark Theater. McClintock decided that the company would picket outside the Altria Theatre and demonstrate against a touring company that he referred to as part of the Chitlin Circuit. The Chitlin Circuit is a performance genre that

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targets Black audiences but often uses stereotypically Black characters that resemble racial tropes in minstrel shows designed to entertain white audiences. In Wilson’s iconic speech “The Ground On Which I Stand,” Wilson considers the Chitlin Circuit a modern version of the enslaved Africans performing for the benefit of the master on the plantation: “An important part of Black theatre that is often ignored but is seminal to its tradition is its origins on the slave plantations of the South. Summoned to the “big house” to entertain the slave owner and his guests, the slave that reached its pinnacle for Whites consisted of whatever the slave imagined or knew that his master wanted to see and hear. This tradition has its present life counterpart in the crossover artists that slant their material for White consumption.” Conversely, Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues that the Chitlin Circuit is meant as entertainment for Black audiences to laugh at themselves, and create a reprieve from the political and social relatives of African Americans, and not mean to be considered “high art” but rather entertainment for their community. McClintock would disagree with the production of such buffoonery, especially within the context of Richmond – at the commercial White theatre with primarily White audiences. Therefore, his demonstration was an advertisement for their upcoming production of *The Blacks*, but also served to resist the mainstream theatre for promoting stereotypes and making money off this type of entertainment. Mary Hodges recalls:

Ernie said, you know what, “We are going to picket, we are going to protest.” We had a show coming up “The Blacks” so it was a way of

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advertising. We dressed up in our costumes and we marched. And he wanted us to get a sense of pride and privilege to do the theatre we did. And there are these people paying all this money for the stereotypical, buffoonish entertainment. So he was really livid about it and he wanted us to see why. We were marching, singing songs, doing scenes, monologues. It was an educational process in the capital of the confederacy.²²¹

A Chitlin Circuit production performed in Richmond’s landmark theatre that typically hosts “high culture” White Broadway shows to primarily White audiences highlights August Wilson’s critique. Therefore, the White Richmond audience experience of Black characters is through their White gaze and these characters are not meant for White consumption. The irony of the characters that Gates argues is lost in this context and the perpetuation of the stereotypes in a theatre that does not promote education or other Black stories because the vision of the production collectively established by the young actors and seasoned director.

The protest served as advertising for their own production, which VCU slated to perform May 1 and 2 in 1993, but due to McClintock’s unconventional process, the administration refused the performance inside their formal space. The actors were not privy to the details of the disagreement but DL Hopkins who played “Diouf” and assisted with the logistics of production process recalls: “…we had an agreement with VCU to put on a production at their theatre. Because Ernie has an unorthodox rehearsal, process, everything, he did not adhere to the rules in which they wished to confine him in. But he agreed to do a show. So we were going to do a show. So we went from the theatre to a tent outside.”²²²

²²¹ Mary Hodges, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, August 29, 2015.
²²² Hopkins, interview.
The production was J. Ron Fleming’s introduction to the Jazz Actors Theatre, and the chaos surrounding the production, he insists was part of McClintock’s genius.

The Jazz Actors noted that they were rehearsing up to the opening performance in which the process-driven play was about creating tension. Despite the cast’s recollection of confusing process and content of the play, the makeshift tent outside on the grounds of VCU, J.W. Horne Robinson’s review in the “The Richmond Planet” called the production a “tour de force” ensemble. McClintock’s directing and teaching philosophy required the actors to swim in the confusion of the play aligned with the conundrum of Black actors struggling against the White mainstream. They played ridiculous characters (McClintock made some characters even more outrageous- such as J. Ron Fleming as a gay valet akin to a Liberace-type) and as college students were prohibited from performing inside their university theatre. The actors’ recollection of the absurd and chaotic production translated to a review ironically described as a “tour de force” by a professional critic.

In the program for the show, the reviewer picked up on this revolutionary act in Richmond. The director’s note, “…for the audience as to …what this play is about, [McClintock] answers the question with the question… what do you think it’s about? …” Robinson concludes, “…my most prevalent view is that it’s about a group of talented, developing African American actors who-with no place to perform was available to them- craftily solved the dilemma by performing in a

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tent next to the very ‘nice’ VCU Performing Arts Center.” McClintock’s unwavering negotiation with the rules of a university’s Performing Arts Center and demonstration of a commercial theatre promoting stereotypes demonstrates how he applied this resistance to the mainstream, to create space and a voice for young actors within the particular context of Richmond, Virginia.

McClintock’s commitment to the local Richmond community is grounded in an Afrocentric worldview, which he passed along to his pupils. This worldview is based in Molefi Asante’s establishment of the very notion of Afrocentricity. Asante’s perspective is a moral and intellectual engagement to posit Africans as subjects, rather than objects of human history. In other words, “since an art grows out of a culture and reflects and perpetuates the values of the culture from which it emerges, the values of an art are inextricably connected to the cultural identities of the creators of the art.” With regards to The Blacks, McClintock’s worldview within the context of Richmond essentially adapted Genet’s text in production and practice, addressing the dominant Eurocentric commercial culture in this local community.

As opposed to the Afro-American Studio, whose community was rich in Black culture and all worked in their own way to create revolutionary theatre, Richmond’s particular context and student body shaped McClintock’s repertoire in both scripted, and what practitioners today call devised work. In Harlem, he established a poetry theatre for and by women, directed primarily by Helmar

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224 Ibid.
225 Asante, Afrocentric Idea Revised, xll.
Cooper, and in Richmond he recognized the need to give a voice to the womanist perspective, and also create a theatre to educate African American youth. As Thaddeus Daniels articulated, “Devised is not new, Ernie was one of the originals.”

Beyond just theory and history, the very plays he chose and created for the actors in conjunction with the technique, educated the artists and the audiences. Although the education he provided his students did not occur in a formal classroom, they devised productions such as *The Collard Greens and Cornbread Divas* and *Sense of Pride*. *Collard Greens and Cornbread Divas*, a theatrical piece, centered on Black women’s experiences so who better to create his piece, but the women themselves. *Sense of Pride* was a children’s show based on the African Diaspora experience: “One of the most brilliant things he came up with … We just did the show like that as an ensemble. We found these stories and put it together as one show. We called it *Sense of Pride* because they were plays based on the African American diaspora experience. Some of them were boring until we thought of it like a children’s show … This story about how the sky became the sky.”

Although I have yet to find more detailed archival material on *Sense of Pride*, the production highlights McClintock’s connection to education and community for the next generation of African Americans in Richmond, where the education system does not include histories and narratives connected to African folktales promoting Black Pride.

Part of the theoretical grounding in Afrocentricity is the connection to the African diaspora that really came into full fruition in the 1970s. It was the efforts

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227 Daniels, interview.
228 Hodges, interview.
for “Black Consciousness” that gave way to Pan-Africanism. Iman Shabazz considers himself a Pan-Africanist and includes the education he received from McClintock as beyond the mechanics of theatre:

The interesting thing is that I stayed with Ernie in his home and looked at his books. He had Franz Fanon, Askia Touré, things I had never seen. All these things helped me to see a sphere of thought around how important connecting theatre to the culture and the culture to the people.229

The ensemble dynamic of McClintock encouraged a community-based focus rather than commercial aspirations, which is also grounded in an Afrocentric worldview encountered throughout the African diaspora. For example, in a performance of The Collard Greens and Cornbread Divas, Thaddeus Daniels recalls that in performance, the women would pick a man from the audience and rub his feet with oils to create a real connection to the audience and to the community.230

By creating a unified story on stage that used the cultural perspectives and related practices in the preparation and performance, McClintock’s approach to training actors to engage with audiences accentuated the importance of African ancestry and culture for the performers and audiences. According to Levy Lee Simon, McClintock’s primary influence also relates to McClintock’s notion of integrating the African ancestry in the work, connecting theatre to the community, and connecting the work to the political and social issues of the day.231 Part of

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229 Shabazz, interview.
230 Daniels, interview.
231 Levy Lee Simon is a poet, director, playwright, and actor. His most celebrated work in the American theatre is For the Love of Freedom (2001) about the Haitian Revolution and Independence 1791-1820. This play received 17 nominations from the NAACP and Ovation Award Committees, and in 2001 he won the NAACP award for Best Playwright.
that unified story is the African diaspora where McClintock promoted pride within African American culture, and a connection to African ancestry.

McClintock’s resistance to mainstream theatre and commercial success, as well as his focus on the community, the agency of African Americans artists to tell their own stories, and the representation of Black life on stage, inspires an approach to acting that recognizes the role of representation on self-perception, self-determination, and self-actualization for actors and their audiences.\(^{232}\) Profit, notoriety, commercial success on Broadway, and acceptance by White critics and audiences were never a top priority. Hence, McClintock and his mentees inadvertently uncovered the potentially negative influence of these elements, particularly for Black Americans. The negative influence of these elements is best seen in Spike Lee’s *Bamboozled* (2000), which exposes the fatal ramifications of Black stereotypes used for the profit of White production companies. Aside from lives at stake, as demonstrated in the movie, the perpetuation of the stereotypes of an Uncle Tom and Coon bleeds into the consciousness of society and results in daily racism and continual perpetuation of cultural traumas. For this reason, McClintock’s devotion to community-oriented theatre, education, and the autonomy of the Black artist encouraged many of his mentees to become educators.

The underlying message of McClintock’s use of observation and imagination through the Common Sense technique emphasizes humanity and all

\(^{232}\) Primus, interview.
of its permutations, especially with regards to Black experiences.\textsuperscript{233} As an educator, Gwendolen Hardwick primarily applies McClintock’s concept of observations in her own teaching.\textsuperscript{234} She understands this concept in terms of an actor viewing the world as his or her classroom, and observing the human condition to create character. However, at the same time, an actor must think of him or herself in that fictitious situation and think about how one would react in that situation. Therefore, “…everything was about the humanity of the character and your ability of any given moment that your humanity is wrapped up in that character because you have the ability to make those choices as well.”\textsuperscript{235} She encourages all her actors to think about this dichotomy, especially as it relates to empathy in social activism. The direct correlation with social activism is Hardwick’s variation of McClintock’s work, developed by McClintock’s training. She asserts that without having trained at the Afro-American Studio, she would not have had the confidence in her value in society, and carries that legacy of self-determination onto her students. To create a bridge between the actor-teacher and his or her community requires a broad knowledge of humankind as well as a connection to one’s own personal humanity. In Richmond, without reservation, McClintock addressed the immediate concerns of his community and his actors, and in practice as a teacher-director-producer embodied self-determination and community building.

\textsuperscript{233} Hardwick, interview.  
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid.
Jazz Aesthetics and Theory

The focus on creating an ensemble company as part of the training, as opposed to a separate conservatory (the Afro-American Studio) and company (the 127th Repertory Ensemble), allowed the students to apply the technique in rehearsal and in productions. This application of technique directly into the process is innovative in that many conservatories in the country such as the Actors Studio or Julliard do not focus on production until their final year. Many schools even restrict actors from auditioning and/or performing until the school deems them ready. Furthermore, in rehearsals for professional shows, actors are often from programs that teach varying techniques. McClintock wanted to ensure that his ensemble spoke the same language, and approached the work with the same technique, Jazz Acting.

The concept of applying the jazz form to other artistic mediums has been established in the realm of poetry, writing, community workshops, and visual arts. Just as in the tradition of jazz as a musical form, there are over fifty jazz genres including Bebop, Cool Jazz, Gypsy Jazz, Jazz-funk, and Traditional Jazz. However, the aesthetics of jazz holistically connect to a revolutionary spirit. When Jazz Aesthetics are fully realized in performance, the performance engenders fostering the community, celebrating humanity, liberating all people.236 In terms of the Jazz Aesthetic framework, I would then contend that McClintock’s

entire process of rehearsal and instruction, not just what happens in production on stage, lives within Jazz Aesthetics.

McClintock is in conversation with other iterations of Jazz Aesthetics including the work of Omi Osun L. Jones, Sharon Bridgforth, Polyphony Person, Laurie Carlos, and Florinda Bryant, whose nuanced approaches of the artist performing Jazz Aesthetics are chronicled in *Experiments in Jazz Aesthetics*. Jones’ approach emanates from a womanist perspective in which her manifesto argues that when women of color are free, then the whole of society will be free.237 Her work that is detailed in this anthology focuses on the Austin Project in which the “… presence of Whiteness would stimulate a series of internal and external conversations that are part of our mutual empowerment.”238 Her entry point to creating art is from her lived experience as a woman of color, and her workshops work to find narratives that are “lodged” in women’s bodies. Although McClintock worked with devised pieces, I would distinguish his approach as more rooted in text, especially as his technique developed in Richmond.

In *Experiments in Jazz Aesthetics*, one group whose focus is on “Polyphony,” developed during the Austin Project, looked to the elder community to guide the artists in the process of expressing their individuality.239 Similarly, McClintock’s younger generation in Richmond, looked to the older generation from the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech, and the 127th Street 237 Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, “Making Space,” 9. 238 Ibid, 9. 239 Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, “Framing the Work,” in *Experiments in Jazz Aesthetics: Art Activism, Academia, and the Austin Project*, 12.
Repertory Ensemble to mentor their professional careers in the arts. Mary Hodges made a point to highlight McClintock’s efforts to connect the actors from Richmond with the veteran actors in New York: “Our Richmond group, we didn’t have a sense of NYC. He would bring down Jerome Preston Bates- he did a show with us. He would bring Joan Green and before it hits home. And Lola Louis. He brought down people so that there wouldn’t be a disconnect. He really cared. A lot of building didactic with the community.”

Additionally, Laurie Carlos’s exploration of a dialogue between the tempo and rhythm of language with gesture, and subsequent character development echoes McClintock’s exercises within the ensemble. However, what distinguishes McClintock’s technique, developed in the 1960s and through to Richmond, is that his particular entry point as a twice-marginalized member of the community is that of a Black queer individual.

The foundations of Jazz Aesthetics as a framework help contextualize Ernie McClintock’s approach to the acting and production that he solidified in Richmond. In Bridgforth’s experience as The Austin Project’s inaugural Anchor Artist, she outlines the following components as the crux of the form: Be present, breathe, listen, improvise, simultaneous truths, collaboration, virtuosity, body-centered awareness, and metamorphosis. The first ingredient, “be present” simply states, “feel what you are feeling right now”. This principle of “feel what you are feeling now” and “being present” echoes a recorded rehearsal of

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240 Hodges, interview.
241 The Anchor Artist is defined as the individual who facilitates weekly workshops and pushes women to examine the choices that impede their development as present and responsive human beings. Ibid.
242 Ibid., 6.
McClintock and his ensemble in 1975.\textsuperscript{243} The warm up consisted of the actors sitting in a chair and taking deep breaths on McClintock’s cue. Then he would count out 1-2-3-4 as the pupils were instructed to turn their heads to the right then the left on each four count. Eventually, McClintock cued the actors to make sounds from nature – the wind and the water. After about 15 minutes of settling into their bodies and their voices, he prompted the actors to “sound out how you feel” before moving into a rhythm chant as a collective. Geno Brantley, McClintock and Walker’s surrogate son, recalls that this exercise was the consistent factor in McClintock’s acting classes and rehearsals. McClintock’s approach both recognizes the individual finding their breath, rhythm, and voice, then expressing vocally how they feel in the present moment, which in principle echoes Bridgforth’s prescription for being present.

The notion of breathing is not just a physiological one, but also the contribution of one’s breathing to the communal song. Bridgforth says “Breathing and being present go hand in hand,” which echoes McClintock’s belief that creative communication allows for a harmonious and identifiable style in production.\textsuperscript{244} It is a group effort with a collective rhythm. The performers are not individually working; rather, they function as a community of equals creating a communal piece.

Listening, the third component relies on being present and breathing. This deep and concentrated listening necessitates a simultaneous connection to one’s


breath, and to the sensory stimuli in the external environment. In other words, the
performer engages in heightened listening to maximize awareness of the
surroundings. For the actor on the stage, listening has to do with being in tune
with the audience, the external sounds of the stage (lights, footsteps, creaks in the
floor), as well as their fellow performers.

The concept of simultaneous truths in Jazz Aesthetics encapsulates Ernie
McClintock’s vision for the Jazz Actors Theatre. Bridgforth explains that this
complex concept is reliant on the ability to imagine more than one event, sound,
or idea at a time. She says “… sometimes it feels like a competition, sometimes it
feels like synthesis, and other times it could be chaos; the work valorizes
multiplicity rather than singularity; the work encourages layering of images,
ideas, sounds, experiences.” Simultaneous truths promote the idea of a
multiplicity of Black experiences, not one Black experience. Sometimes they are
in competition, and sometimes they come together in unity. The importance of
McClintock’s theatre and training is promoting multiple aesthetics, as opposed to
a singular Black aesthetic. Marc Primus reflected on this notion: “I don’t think
we have found one aesthetic. Black culture is fragmented because the variety of
Black culture is so profound, dense, and complex. We are only 40 million people
with at least 10,000 theories I imagine.” Rejecting the notion of a singular
aesthetic invites room for a plethora of voices and experiences, a polyphony and
multivocality rooted in the jazz tradition. McClintock encouraged his students to

245 Ibid.
246 Primus, interview.
bring their unique perspectives to their acting work, and also chose productions that represented diversity of experience.

The next core ingredients, collaboration and virtuosity, relate to McClintock’s concept of ensemble and technique, which balances fellowship among the actors as well as promotes individual artistic expression. In Jazz Aesthetics, collaboration means that the individuals must work with others without ego. With actors, it is often difficult to temper egos, but McClintock succeeded with his company in New York and Richmond. As Bolanyle Edwards remarked, “Nobody felt like they had to be a star. There was no competition. Everyone was there of the same accord.” McClintock created this collaborative ensemble by creating the atmosphere of family both on and off the stage. Furthermore, in Richmond, the ensemble of actors refers to their group as the Jazz Actors Family. Essentially, collaboration necessitates humility from all the artists, which will enhance the group dynamic and allow space for individual voices.

Jones and Bridgforth refer to individual artistic expression as virtuosity: One must “… bring forth your idiosyncratic self-vocalizations, gestures, thinking, and beauty.” Virtuosity connects to McClintock’s observation exercises to cultivate a detailed character study. Beyond observations, an essential part of the Character Analysis is answering the question, “What would I be doing if I were the character in this situation?” Drawing from one’s own experience and daily

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247 Bolanyle Edwards, interview.
life encourages the actor to bring his or her own idiosyncrasies, gestures, and activities. For example Mary Hodges noted, “… It’s all about character. But you are the person being the character … Let’s say I have this wonderful skill of crocheting. Why not crochet while you are having a scene if that makes sense.”

Within the context of the collaborative ensemble, artists have the opportunity to make their own choices and create character through their own experiences and perspective.

The next theoretical component is called body-centered awareness, which directly relates to the notions of rhythm, the character’s center, and relaxation in the acting technique; undoubtedly, McClintock stressed the importance of the actor’s body in his training. However, within the context of Jazz Aesthetics, being body-centered expands beyond just gesture or physicality. The body is a site of memory where the form “… recognizes the body as a site of knowledge; memory and daily living are lodged in the muscles, and must be resurrected … experience is passed on from person to person.”

There were no specific exercises related to unleashing or unlocking memories lodged in the muscles for McClintock. However, the emphasis on Black history, culture, and ancestry certainly connected the actors with knowledge of their collective past when reading books like Black Odyssey. Bolanyle Edwards remarked, “The importance of learning history as an artist. It’s about developing character when you know what your people were like, it helps you to know who you are. You can develop

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249 Hodges, interview.
Therefore the idea of the body relates to both the physical presence of the individual and the metaphysical presence of ancestors.

The final aspect of Jazz Aesthetics, metamorphosis, is where the artist solidifies the work through practice and discipline to create art for the greater good. In other words, it is “repeated practice of these principles which changes spirit and thinking, and behavior and knowledge; this is the basis of the formation of a just, humane community.”

Jazz Aesthetics and McClintock’s theatre fosters community building not just within the company itself, but also with the audience and the community for whom they performed. In a 1974 interview McClintock asserted, “By coming together, we are legitimizing ourselves rather than looking to [White producers] to legitimize us. These theatres (in the Black Theatre Alliance) are an important viable part of the Black community. They are representative of Black culture and belong in our communities and are as important as anything else.”

By instituting this technique and approaching the work without the White western lens, the company of actors works as a family in order to disseminate that spirit and pride to the greater audience and immediate community.

The Legacy of the Black Arts Movement in Richmond

Although McClintock adjusted his technique to an OJT model and renamed his company the Jazz Actors Theatre, his protégés in New York and Richmond are trained to have the same vocabulary so that in rehearsals, they

251 Bolanyle Edwards, interview.
253 McClintock, interview.
speak the same language and create a theatrical jazz piece. He defined the importance of consistent terminology among actors in *Black Theatre Alliance Magazine* in 1978, and carried the same principles to Richmond in the 1990s. He asserted that the terms repertory, ensemble style, and technique were the most overused terms during the Black Theatre Movement. In a sense, he defined these terms in the same way he discovered his own acting technique, through observations of what would serve Black actors in training. In interviews, actors that worked with him in Richmond until his death in 2003 confirmed that he never faltered from these definitions, which is what makes the ensemble such a “tour de force” among critics and audiences. These common terms provide the process for the individual actor to create a level of specificity and detail that is able to play in concert with the other actors, and discover riffs born from rigorous preparation.

Furthermore, each character that an actor performs should not be like his or her last one. According to McClintock, “An actor is (or certainly should be) more than a shell, a body and voice that moves around and talks without a mind, without a point of view and without concern for proper projection of life-styles.” Certainly McClintock’s concern for “truth” is consistent in many commonly known western techniques. However, his assessment of the majority of Black actors in New York was that they were “imitators” who “refus[ed] to be

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255 Ibid.
themselves."256 His approach allows for their embracing of their cultural heritage, starting with their lived experiences.

Additionally, the five foundational components of the technique listed in an interview with critic A. Peter Bailey, which include freedom to act, speech, music and rhythm, and responsibility and discipline, have remained consistent with McClintock’s approach. In particular, I argue that the principle of speech remained consistently important because stereotypes associated with African Americans “speaking well” has not changed much since the 1960s. For example, one of McClintock’s former students, New York-based director and actor Mary Hodges, pointed out that whenever you meet a Jazz actor (or Afro-American Studio actor), one notices that the speech is impeccable. Hodges argues that as a person of color, the issue of speech is fraught. For example, she is a well-known Shakespearean actor. When a casting director looks at her resume she will rarely be called in for an August Wilson play, making assumptions about her lack of ability to do characters written by and for people of color. The reverse scenario is also true. McClintock believed that his technique applied to Baraka or Shakespeare, and that no matter what, an actor should be heard with little effort. He says, “Contrary to the beliefs of some, it is not ‘White’ or ‘European’ to speak well. At the same time, the Black idiom should be used as much as possible but the actor should theatricalize his vocal efforts.”257 The aspect of “theatricalizing” is the actor focusing on rhythm and tempo, to emphasize the Black idiom for an

257 McClintock, “Perspective on Black Acting,” 83-84.
audience. The fundamentals of voice and speech at the Studio focused on the actor’s responsibility to learn to control his or her instrument, with the ability to apply vocal variety, diction, and vocal flexibly projection and word value.²⁵⁸

The use of music and rhythm as a central concept in the Common Sense philosophy is rooted in the cultural connection to the multiplicity of African American experiences. McClintock states that for “most Black people,” music is a significant part of existence.²⁵⁹ Again, he does not claim that there is one Black experience, but based on a collective and historical memory, he and many other scholars such as David Blight, Harvey Young, and E. Patrick Johnson, have come to the same conclusion. He asserts that because of this deep connection music has to the Black experience, it cannot be erased from theatrical production; on the contrary music is essential: “We hear music in our heads constantly, walk to it, work it, hum it, sing it.”²⁶⁰ Therefore, especially when playing a Black character, an actor must create a rhythm for that character and know what music that character listens to when he or she wakes up in the morning, for example. This selection is not for the sake of adding music, but rather must be grounded in the clues of the text.

A major theme that runs through the research of Ernie McClintock’s studios and productions is the idea of responsibility and discipline. When he says responsibility, he means that the actor in Black theatre has the responsibility to create a true characterization that will educate the audiences with an in-depth and

²⁵⁸ Word value is how much emphasis or weight an actor gives to any given word. This becomes more specific as the technique evolved at the Jazz Actors Theatre. Simon, interview.
²⁵⁹ Ibid.
²⁶⁰ Ibid.
moving experience. McClintock clearly states that to embody and represent Black experiences on stage is a serious vocation that requires discipline. He had little patience for lazy actors, those interested in commercial success, or unprepared students. He boldly ends the article in the Black Alliance Newsletter with “CP time has no place in the theatre.” Although there are positive connotations with CP time that refer to a rhythm of life that allows for greater appreciation, I presume that McClintock knew the stereotype that Black people are “always late,” and thus assuring that his actors were consistently on time, would lead to greater success in White and Black run theatres.

Finally, whether McClintock was in Richmond in the 1990s or in New York in the 1960s, the technique necessitated detail-oriented actors. For example, in the pursuit of an objective on stage, the actor predetermines activities (commonly referred to as stage business in dominant acting theory) because McClintock asserted that human beings are always doing something on stage, even when they are listening. These activities are not just to fill space or time, but served the purpose of providing detailed information to the audience:

You had to constantly shower the audience with information, nonverbal. The way in which you walk on stage tells a lot about who you are, where you came from and where you might go. It was all about cultivating a character from the ground up. Every second you were on stage you communicating information for the audiences that’s outside of the script, born from your character analysis. We didn’t just memorize lines and do a show. From the ground up we had to prove we had created not just an interesting character, but a whole life, filling in the gaps the writer left out.

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261 CP time, also known as “Colored People time” suggests that African Americans are consistently late and careless.
262 Collective definition by the Jazz Actors. Jazz Actors, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 9, 2015.
263 Hopkins, interview.
The level of detail associated with the activities, and the particular way a character engaged with objects and people were predetermined, explored, experimented with for hours at a time. At times, the actors grew tired from the hours of rehearsal, but all knew that the work, and bold risk-taking yields profound performances. McClintock often told his actors that even if they are performing a seemingly mundane activity, they must not be ordinary, but extraordinary.264

In Richmond, the paradigm shift that occurred was not just in name, with an emphasis on Jazz Acting, but it extended to McClintock honing his On-the-Job-Training (OJT). Other Eurocentric teachers and programs differ from McClintock even in the contemporary moment, because institutions rarely bridge the gap between technique and how to apply that technique in performance. For example, at the Actors Studio, I spent two and a half years studying the vocal technique, sense memory, and Alexander movement. However, once cast in a play, the hired director rarely speaks the same language of the technique, and blocks a play with his or her vision. In other words, the rehearsal process is about the directors fulfilling their own vision, whereas McClintock saw the theatre as a communal vision and ongoing discovery process.

Technique in the rehearsal studio for a production is rarely applied, and many directors assert that the acting technique is the actor’s homework. Yet actors are not taught how to translate that technique in the rehearsal studio. As casting director Christine McKenna from Harriet Bass Casting and Bernard

264 Smith, interview.
Casting has bluntly informed students while I conducted workshops with her, she will not go to a repertory season from lesser known schools, except primarily Julliard and Yale. Furthermore, she says on actor’s resumes, if they don’t have a “big name” training school, most well known casting agencies will not bring them in for auditions.

Notably, many acting programs use the term objective in order to motivate the actor, but the main difference in Jazz Acting is that the outcome of that objective in any given live performance can change. As opposed to other techniques such as Meisner’s repetition, observations are based solely on what is happening in the moment and on an actor’s scene partner. In Jazz Acting, the actor must come to the rehearsal room fully prepared and grounded in the text, character biography, and physical gestures, to then yield an improvised outcome. With other European-based techniques, the actor in a sense improvises first and then goes back to the text. In Strasberg’s sense memory, one grounds themselves in the external circumstances, and at times does not reach text until the fourth or fifth week of class, whereas McClintock began with text as an entry point for his students.

In mainstream acting schools, the rehearsal process in production is not for exploration, but focused on result rather than process. With McClintock, the rehearsal process was also a learning environment. According to Jerome Preston Bates who was recently cast in the Broadway production of August Wilson’s Jitney, “[The rehearsal process with Ernie] was like going to school, acting school. It was more than put on a play; it was putting life on the stage. He gave
us the opportunity to come and to understand our craft, see what he had and what we didn’t have and how we could include what we had in our work." Bates joined the 127th Street Repertory Company in the 1980s, where the roots of McClintock’s OJT began to fully form because he cast actors that were not necessarily part of the Afro-American School, although he treated the rehearsal room as the same platform to learn technique and hone one’s craft.

**Specific Developments of Jazz Acting as an OJT Model**

On-the-Job-Training techniques that McClintock integrated in Richmond developed due to the specific needs of his actors, and also of note, the government not funding the educational social programming that mushroomed during the Black Arts Movement. Also, in the 1960s in Harlem, finding freedom was a primary objective, given the political gestalt of the time, while in Richmond, the emphasis was more so on language. I contend that the reason surrounding this different focus is because of the political and social context of the 1960s, versus his students in Richmond. Many of these students, in the 1990s, were enrolled in surrounding colleges; for example Mary Hodges pursued her BFA at Virginia Commonwealth University while studying with McClintock at nights and on weekends. In a typical university with a BFA program, speech and language are taught from a European standpoint, not an Afrocentric lived experience. Nonetheless, four specific developments during OJT in Richmond include McClintock’s take on Character Bios, as well as his established Jazz Acting techniques referred to as the First Word, Secrets, and Jazzing It.

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265 Bates, interview.
Character Analysis at the Jazz Actors Theatre mimics the exercise established in Harlem in 1966, in which McClintock instructed the actors to develop a detailed autobiography with the minimum length of one and a half to two pages. J. Ron Fleming explained:

The initial thing we had to do was write a character analysis. In order to push us he said it had to be a page and a half. To force you not to just write down a couple of sentences. You were to put all kinds of details that no one would know outside the project necessarily. But it informed the way you behave on stage. This would be as detailed as your mother’s first boyfriend before you were born, and somehow you in your own mind decide how these different experiences from the past develop you as a person that you are in this character.266

Furthermore, the analysis helps the actor understand why and how the character sees the world. It is a way of also developing empathy for one’s character, especially if on the surface they appear to be villainous or from the lower echelons of society. The autobiography and backstory helps actors to avoid general stereotyping of characters, for example in Ed Bullins’ *Goin’ A Buffalo* (1972), the characters are of low socioeconomic class and may seem “thuggish” but upon closer examination they are full of depth and humanity. Performing stereotypes of these characters from lower socioeconomic classes would perpetuate the lack of humanity in these constituencies, and downplay the poetry within particular sects of the African American community. The actor must use her imagination to fill in the gaps with specificity such as “who was your mother’s first boyfriend when you were born.”267 From this analysis the actor

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266 J Ron Fleming, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 18, 2015.
267 Hopkins, interview.
then creates the information list, which feeds into the physicality of one’s character.

One of the most beloved aspects of the technique by the Jazz Actors is known as secrets, a technique McClintock integrated because as a “family,” the actors knew each other quite well, and therefore secrets encouraged the actors to keep each other in the moment, live on stage, and never fully comfortable in the routine of performance. Simply, a secret is something that fuels the intent of the scene that your scene partners are not privy to. The actors in Richmond are indeed a close-knit family and they instituted secrets into the technique to keep performances spontaneous and fresh. For example, J. Ron Fleming’s performance of Keith Glover’s *Coming of the Hurricane* (1996) in 2001, the script simply states that the character exits the stage. Sharalyn Bailey recounted her time as the Assistant Stage Manager in rehearsal:

> J. Ron went up to the vom and [he] backed up in fear and rushed out the other way. Ernie had [him] do it again and he said to me “Watch what J. Ron does.” Then in the next scene there had been a mob that came. But it didn’t say in the script his character left, saw the mob, and exited in the opposite direction. That was HIS idea. That’s the kind of thing that sticks with you. Information and details.

McClintock encouraged creativity and risk taking with the secrets. These secrets relate again back to the concept of showering the audience with details and information. They also fuel the scene in that the other actors in the scene will have to adjust their objectives and riff with what is happening in that moment.

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268 Ibid.
269 Ibid.
270 Bailey, interview.
With each scene, McClintock insisted on follow through, which means a “punch” or flash of a moment to conclude a unit, scene, or the play itself.

In the spirit of one ensemble and a community, McClintock established the First Word, which served to create a distinct, fully realized character from the first moment an actor appears on stage. The actor now has a detailed and thorough understanding of the character based on both the text and imagination, and she transitions into scene work. This moment is the first time the character is seen on stage by the audience. The actor must do or say something that establishes who the person is in a flash. After the First Word, there should be a pause and then the actor “goes for it.” Initial possibilities are a particular emphasis of the first word of text, gesture, or even a facial expression. The audience is meant to connect to the actor and then move forward in the scene.

Actor Thaddeus Daniels referenced the late Michael Jackson as a prime example of the First Word in performance. Jackson’s First Word occurred the first moment with a flash of choreography. He drew the audience in with this flash of movement, paused, and proceeded. As Derome Smith contends, “You just don’t turn on the lights and I’m there. What can you do to unpack for the audience when they first see you?” The First Word allows the actor to consider the theatricality of the work. In other words, this is not actually real life or pure “naturalism.” McClintock would say that the person in the back row needs to connect with the First Word, and the actor must create a perfect balance larger

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271 Daniels, interview.
272 Ibid.
273 Smith, interview.
than life yet still grounded in humanity. Thaddeus Daniels recalls that the First Word in vocalization had to be strongly and effectively pronounced. In his role in *Before It Hits Home*, when his first line was “Excuse me, I have an appointment with Dr. Weinberg,” McClintock boldly said to him, “Open your fucking mouth. Don’t murmur. I want to hear what you are saying.”

Geno Brantley, lighting designer, pointed out that the First Word had to be reflected in the lighting design as well. Therefore, the First Word in gesture, language, and design had to strike the audience both visually and aurally.

The fundamentals of the technique including Character Analysis, Text Analysis, and Scene work, all feed into the company dynamic and the ensemble Jazzing It in performance. Jazzing It encompasses McClintock’s definition of ensemble: a group of actors, intensely working with the same technique and philosophy over an extended period of time, resulting in a creative communications process that allows for a harmonious and identifiable style in production. For particular moments, some of the individual acting exercises would translate to the group dynamic. For example, activities could be collective stage business, like setting a table together, to help tell the story. Mary Hodges recalls the notion of Jazzing It in performances, which she still applies to her acting and directing work. She explains the process:

Choose an ensemble moment and collectively do something together. The audience may not necessarily pick up on it. But we decide as a group that moment for the story or play. It was called “jazzing it”. It could be something like we all look up and look out and see the sunset. The

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274 Daniels, interview.
ensemble as a collective planned it. It could be something such as each actor doing the same gesture at different points throughout the play.  

Jazz It moments are dependent on all the character work that precedes it. The actor must be prepared to alter preplanned moments, and allow the performance to be a living, breathing entity. These particular moments as an ensemble bring the actors together as one voice, one community, and within the riffing of the melody; they express their own individual characters, which result in an ever-evolving discovery process.

Conclusion

A misconception of jazz and Jazz Acting purports that the forms are chaotic, random, and structure-less. However, a level of detail and work is required, and is necessary in order to get to the level of sophistication of riffing/improvising on stage. Like jazz music, Jazz Acting is non-linear in the sense that there is no end, and the work is constantly improving. This is an essential concept to understand because other techniques such as Practical Aesthetics, the Method, and Meisner are all geared towards finding “truth” onstage, but not true discovery of an ensemble dynamic. However, Jazz Acting is constantly circulating with multiple elements at play. This connects directly with Bridgforth’s simultaneous truth concept, which identifies the ability to imagine more than one event, sound, or idea at a time. D.L. Hopkins notes that night after night, the actor approaches the same melody, the same text, but has the

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276 Hodges, interview.
277 Ibid.
278 Shabazz, interview.
opportunity to continue to improve upon what he performed the night prior, as opposed to trying to replicate a past performance. Although the Jazz Actors Theatre lacked the institutional framework of the Afro-American Studio, McClintock still ensured cultural and historical education as part of the students’ curriculum, and trained actors to be able to apply their technique in any rehearsal context. However, they all note that McClintock’s assertion that he spoiled them in the rehearsal room, albeit with demanding long hours, detailed biographies, and constant discovery has proven true long after his passing.
CHAPTER THREE

The Queer Black Power Aesthetic: Multiple Perspectives, Black Power, and Performance

From the Harlem Renaissance to our contemporary moment, scholars and practitioners continue to debate over how to define the Black Aesthetic, issues of Black authenticity, the virtues of assimilation, and the efficacy of theatre as a conduit for social change. In scholarship, art as a model of social change is discussed at the leading conferences such as American Society for Theatre Research and the Association in for Theatre in Higher Education. In the 1960s, these charged discussions both in publications such as *New York Amsterdam News*, *The Black Theatre Alliance* magazine, and *Black Dialogue*, and in events such as the New Lafayette Theatre’s 1968 book party for Harold Cruse’s *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), which erupted in violence, all surrounded Ernie McClintock in Harlem. McClintock and his contemporaries, namely Amiri Baraka (BART/S), Robert Macbeth (New Lafayette Theatre), and Barbara Ann Teer (National Black Theatre), ideologically disagreed during this Cultural Revolution; however, irrespective of their differences, they shared a common goal of unifying artists and audiences in their communities. As scholar Annemarie

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281 In 1968, the New Lafayette Theatre organized a book party which attracted middle-class Blacks and militant Blacks. A heated debate took place and a fight broke out with the militants thrown out of the theatre. The building mysteriously burned down that evening. It is not confirmed who is responsible for the fire, many suspect the Black militants. Williams, *Black Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s*, 55.
Bean argues, the Black Arts Movement essentially opposed any concept of an artist alienated from his or her community; at its core, the movement speaks to the aspirations and needs of Black America.\textsuperscript{282} For McClintock, community started with the ensemble, a critical concept of his acting technique and productions. Within the ensemble he trained actors to liberate themselves from the White gaze, reevaluate the concept of self, and explore their cultural identity and ontological experience. Therefore, in many respects, McClintock’s approach and vision for Black Theatre echo the Black Aesthetic.

The Black Aesthetic emerged from the volatile political and social context of 1960s Harlem, where McClintock formed the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech in 1966. Annemarie Bean and Monica White Ndounou recognize that a defining characteristic of Black theatre history centers on creating community, and finding a commonality in the struggle against, and the survival of White hegemony.\textsuperscript{283} The Black Arts Movement in particular resulted from the slow burn of progress to change discriminatory practices mandated by the government. With the assassination of Malcolm X, cries for social justice grew louder, and civil rights activists transitioned to a strategy of refusing to negotiate with White political leaders, and therefore adopted a separatist strategy.

Twenty years prior to Malcolm X’s murder and before the establishment of McClintock’s Afro-American Studio, Black soldiers returned from World War II where they had risked their lives in pursuit of global democracy. Once these

\textsuperscript{283} Monica White Ndounou. “Black Arts Movement” (lecture, Tufts University, Medford, MA, October 25, 2012).
patriots resettled in their communities, they confronted the reality that Jim Crow laws and discriminatory practices had remained unchanged in the United States. Furthermore, the mainstream media and entertainment industry continued to perpetuate false stereotypes in new iterations. For example, Uncle Remus, initially an African folktale character, evolved into a cousin of the Uncle Tom: A naïve comic philosopher satisfied with his second tier status in society. Malcolm X rallied Black communities to fight against legal inequalities and stereotypes, and the prolific leader subsequently mobilized African Americans nationwide. His death impacted the nation and in particular, the Harlem community, to the degree that a newfound urgency for social justice surged through northern Manhattan. Poet Amiri Baraka created the Black Arts Repertory Theatre School (BART/S), a theatre of revolution, accessible only to his Black brothers and sisters. In the midst of the violence and fighting against oppression, Baraka’s school aimed to open dialogue between the artists and his people, rather than between the artists and the dominant White society, a goal equally important to Ernie McClintock; however, both in productions and in training, McClintock’s approach centered on the Black actor’s autonomy in the rehearsal process.

I propose that Ernie McClintock’s acting technique defined his versatile repertoire and shaped what I refer to as the Queer Black Power Aesthetic. 

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284 Jim Crow laws were established in 1890 in the Reconstruction Era. Although the government outlawed slavery in 1863, the Jim Crow laws instituted racial segregation at the state and local level, preventing African Americans equal rights in housing, education, consumer practices, and voting. Harry Elam, “Post World War II African American Theatre” In The Oxford Handbook of African American Theatre, 378.

285 Bogle, Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & and Bucks, 7.

286 Williams, A Sourcebook in African American Performance, 52.
define the Queer Black Power Aesthetic as a framework that focuses on the individual’s self-determination, yet also reflects the collective ensemble inclusive of womanist and queer perspectives, which are two demographics typically excluded from the Black Power context. In the Queer Black Power Aesthetic, McClintock echoes Baraka’s core principle of creating a tangible connection between the artists and the community. At first glance, an artist focusing on creating unification in the African diaspora to ignite a revolution would conflict with McClintock’s primacy of actors exploring self-expression. The technique, which evolved into the Jazz Acting Technique: A Common Sense Approach to Acting reflects the Queer Black Power Aesthetic principle of individual autonomy within the context of an inclusive ensemble. McClintock’s theory demonstrates that self-expression and Pan-Africanism are not mutually exclusive projects. I argue that his productions, as early as 1966, that came to life from the Jazz Acting Technique reflect the ideals of the Queer Black Power Aesthetic. Historically, the Queer Black Power Aesthetic predates Gayle Addison Jr.’s 1971 anthology The Black Aesthetic, a seminal collection of essays that challenged the framework of a singular aesthetic that limits the inclusion of multiple Black experiences.

Through the evidence of his technique, testimonials, repertory seasons, and productions, I argue McClintock is a visionary in that the Queer Black Power Aesthetic resulted in authentic and provocative theatre, harmonious with Black

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Power philosophy that enabled reconciliation of these seemingly oppositional theories: The Black Aesthetic versus multiple aesthetics. This mode of inquiry challenges reductive understandings of the Black Arts Movement as a misogynistic and homophobic movement promoting Black militant ideology. Conclusively, these reductive assumptions are due to monolithic understandings of the Black Arts Movement, which neglect those voices outside the straight male framework.

The justification for this research reveals that through McClintock’s technique and productions, he demonstrated that the Black Aesthetic and alternative points of view are equally important, and representative of the Black Arts Movement and its legacy. This analysis reveals the opportunities the Afro American Studio for Acting & Speech, the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble, and the Jazz Actors Theatre afforded the oppressed members of a community to identify with African Americans and promote social justice. In establishing my Queer Black Power Aesthetic theory I engage with the work of Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, Ron Karenga, Nikki Giovanni, David Hilliard, Mike Sell, David Blight, Molefi Asante, W. E. B Du Bois, Alain Locke, Niglun Andolu-Okur, Shirley Ann Tate, E. Patrick Johnson, and Mark Anthony Neal. I analyze the Queer Black Power Aesthetic through McClintock’s productions in Harlem and Richmond, archival evidence, interviews with actors and artists, and reviews. Fundamentally, through the lens of the Queer Black Power Aesthetic, he developed committed actors who worked from a place of integrity and authenticity, resulting in reversing White misconceptions of Blackness. The
The foundation he provided for his actors served both the legacy of the Black Arts Movement and the progress of Black actors in the development of the American Theatre.

The Black Aesthetic, Black Aesthetics, and the Queer Black Power Aesthetic

Initially, one might assume that Ernie McClintock, a queer Black man in Harlem in 1966, would reject the Black Power Movement and by extension, the Black Arts Movement, which seemed to promote an underlying anti-gay rhetoric. In the mid 1960s, poet Amiri Baraka, scholar Larry Neal, and activist Ron Karenga were known to privilege a heternormative Black male experience. Since the establishment of the Black Aesthetic, a palpable tension exists between the limitations of a single aesthetic, which is meant to identify the essence of Black artists. However, situating Black Art as reflective of multiple perspectives provides a more inclusive and comprehensive exploration of artists and performers from their individual points of view. From its inception, Ernie McClintock’s progressive and innovative acting technique reconciled the inherent conflict between the singular Black Aesthetic and multiple aesthetics from gay and female voices. The Jazz Acting Technique promoted self-determination and community building, and benefited performers and spectators from diverse backgrounds. Tracing the theoretical and historical origins of self-determination and community provides the foundation to evaluate McClintock’s acting technique, and versatile repertoire as they relate to actors and audiences relative to their geographical locations. Through McClintock’s Queer Black Power Aesthetic, he established a framework that provided a harmonious space for queer
and female voices, which disrupts the traditional narrative that skews the Black Arts Movement and Black Power philosophy.289

The singular Black Aesthetic calls for a “cultural revolution” as opposed to the political and economic goals of Black Power. The term revolution when associated with the Black Power and Black Arts movement conjures up images of armed Black Panthers rioting in the streets with an assumed goal of anarchy. The Black Panthers certainly saw the necessity of individuals to self-protect against White supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan, and legal entities such as the police enforcing racism. However, the assumption of the Black Panthers as being solely anarchist lacks a comprehensive understanding of an organization that served the community beyond violent means. David Hilliard argues, “Contrary to misleading stories and scandalous representations, the Black Panther Party did not originate simply as an armed and violent response to police brutality and murder. The Black Panther Party is not, and never has been a group of angry young Black ‘militants’ full of hatred and fury toward the White Establishment.”290 On the contrary, Black Power, and by extension, the Black Panthers centered their philosophy on unity, pride, and community-based incentives for political and economic revolution. Black pride and community empowerment resounded in the Black Arts Movement’s call for a cultural revolution.

The first element from the Black Aesthetic reflected in the Queer Black Power Aesthetic is the necessity for self-determination through rejecting White

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training programs’ imposition of a western framework on African Americans.

Self-determination is defined as the resolve to “…call our own names and define our own terms.”\textsuperscript{291} Self-determination in the Black theatre also translates to the autonomy of the actor, play selection and location of theatres in Black communities. Journalist Rhett Jones articulated the history of the White hegemonic power structures in the theatre:

The cultural imperialism of Euro-Americans has placed Blacks and other non-White groups on the defensive. The slaves, for example, conducted their most important rituals away form the prying eyes of the Whites, and it was only when they were safe among their fellow Blacks that they felt free to drop their masks and reveal their true selves. So [while] Blacks concealed themselves and their values that it is often difficult for even their own artists, much less outsiders, to penetrate their defenses and articulate their nature of Blackness.\textsuperscript{292}

In particular, during the 1960s and 1970s, McClintock’s Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech created the space that Jones refers to, in order to reveal their true selves without the imposition of the White gaze. From McClintock’s personal experience of working in the White theatre, he determined a place for his own artistic development, as well as his actors. He did not appeal to White institutions funding his theatre in order to maintain the integrity of Black experiences without White business-minded producers. Holistically, self-determination works to challenge White ideology without a need to define Blackness in relation to White culture.\textsuperscript{293} In other pockets of the Black Arts movement, cultural efforts reclaimed Afrocentric holidays, heroes, institutions,

\textsuperscript{291} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{293} Monica White Ndounou, “Black Arts Movement” (lecture, Tufts University, Medford, MA, October 25, 2012).
and organizations to celebrate Blackness and Black identity. Likewise, McClintock’s theatre invited performers and spectators to engage in the reclamation of Black Culture.

In terms of the technique, the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech empowered the students through creating art that was free from the western gaze through the teaching of Black History and engaging with their communities. They explored the origins of their identity through Black History and culture courses developed by Marc Primus. Furthermore, actors created characters through activities, gestures, and habits, gathered from real-life observations entrenched in the culture of their community. Actors in Harlem and Richmond observed strangers, to create thoughtful and physically crafted characters based on individuals within their respective communities. Self-determination calls attention to the empirical truth that Black folks’ everyday lived experience is different from Whites, which echoes W. E. B. Du Bois’ identification of double consciousness. For McClintock, this basic truth requires an approach to acting, which identifies that African Americans experience the world different in the way they talk, walk, and exist in daily life. As Rhett Jones articulated in an interview with McClintock in 1981, the goal of the Black theatre is not to replace a Eurocentric form, but to offer audiences another perspective articulating the complexity of Blackness. The meaning of Blackness is what the Black Aesthetic attempts to identify and define for both performers and audience members.

The second crucial component of the Black Aesthetic that aligns with Ernie McClintock’s Queer Black Power Aesthetic is the emphasis on community, which in Jazz Acting terms translates to the ensemble and the actor-audience relationship.\textsuperscript{296} Audiences are always an important part of the theatrical experience in any space; but in the context of McClintock’s theatre and his contemporaries in Harlem, the impact of the performance on the audience is a form of social change. Significantly, “… theatre is potentially the most social of all the arts. It is an integral part of the socializing process. It exists in direct relationship to the audience it claims to serve.”\textsuperscript{297} It creates a reciprocal dynamic between the actor and spectator in which “the idea is to open dialogue between the arts and the people, rather than between the artists and the dominant White society.”\textsuperscript{298} Through the basis of creating dialogue with the audience, the Jazz Acting Technique puts the actors in the forefront of productions with limited sets and theatrical effects, to directly connect with the spectators. In a sense, just as McClintock required his actors to take full accountability for their character creation, the actors put the onus on the audience to make changes in their community.

Community-audience engagement in Harlem and Richmond differed based on the lived experiences of the urban north and confederate south; but due to America’s painful past founded on slavery, there is a common thread of what W. E. B. Du Bois identifies as historical and collective memory. \textsuperscript{299}

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\textsuperscript{296} Monica White Ndounou. “Early African American Theatre” (lecture, Tufts University, Medford, MA, November 9, 2012).
\textsuperscript{297} Annemarie Beane, \textit{A Sourcebook in African American Performance} (New York: Routledge, 1999), 60.
\textsuperscript{298} Sell, “Blackness as Critical Practice,” 238.
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memory, developed by French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) purported that individuals depend on other members of their own groups for independent confirmation of the content of their memories. The human need for identity and communion means that culture itself hardly exists without these social dimensions of memories.\textsuperscript{299} Du Bois stressed the importance of the aesthetic appeal of memory and the power of images in poetry. The aesthetics of memory and imagery developed his rhetorical style, particularly after his experience of racism in the South.\textsuperscript{300} On a broad scale, Du Bois argues that history had left a collective responsibility in America, in that slavery and racism were everyone’s legacy and everyone’s problem.

Therefore, Black Theatre is relevant for those outside of the Black community because the country economically built itself on the backs of enslaved African American. Hence, Black experiences and injustices are part of the American national history. The country’s collective memory yearned for new storytellers whose “strivings might liberate it from the past” including a lack of reconciliation with slavery, and a skewed history perpetuating stereotypes by White supremacists.\textsuperscript{301} Ernie McClintock understood this distorted narrative and the impact on his own communities, and so he countered history through his productions accomplished through the Jazz Acting Technique.

The Afro-American Studio continually worked to rehabilitate the community, evidenced by McClintock and Ronald Walker’s mentorship for

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\item \textsuperscript{300} Blight, \textit{History and Memory in African American Culture}, 48.
\item \textsuperscript{301} Ibid., 50.
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individuals who were even caste aside by their own community and/or nuclear families. In Harlem, the Afro-American Studio was situated in a socioeconomic depressed neighborhood where McClintock and Walker connected directly with all facets of the community: Alcoholics, former prostitutes, and criminals. For example, McClintock and Walker’s adopted son, Geno Brantley, who from the ages of thirteen to eighteen regularly committed crimes in Harlem, recalls, “I would do anything to hurt anybody. I didn’t love myself, didn’t love anybody, sold drugs, did number, carried three guns ...”302 He even stole from the Afro-American Studio and without McClintock and Walker’s intervention, his trajectory could have led to incarceration. McClintock and Walker embraced Brantley as their son for forty-five years and offered him the opportunity to work at the Afro-American Studio as an alternative to reporting him to the authorities. Subsequently, Brantley became one of the premiere lighting and sound designers in Harlem and Richmond. In 1995, Brantley won an AUDLECO for his sound design of Wendy Jones’s *In Pursuit of Justice* without a degree in design.303 Brantley insists McClintock and Walker saved his life. Brantley’s journey is similar to many who encountered McClintock and Walker, and demonstrates devotion to the community and the theatre as a temple of healing. McClintock and Walker, similar to the Black Panthers, created a space for Black folks to discover their self-worth and create a family outside the traditional nuclear family.

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302 Geno Brantley, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 9, 2015.
303 *In Pursuit of Justice* is a one-woman show based on the life of Ida B. Wells, a journalist and activist. She was an early leader in the Civil Rights Movement and one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909.
The Richmond community differed from Harlem and although McClintock’s goals shifted depending on the environment, his commitment to providing a platform for Black voices of varying perspectives remained consistent. Richmond is a southern city consisting of 47% African Americans, and yet when McClintock arrived, he noticed that the majority of the theatre patrons were Caucasian. The newcomer to town aimed to create a more diverse theatre community on the stage and in the audience. For example, in the archives there are notes about “Target Audiences” which includes Black businesses, Black churches, and Black community organizations, schools, and civic associations. Actively recruiting Black audiences in the context of the confederacy spoke to McClintock’s commitment to developing a Black Theatre presence and evolving the Jazz Acting Technique.

McClintock’s Jazz Actors Theatre served both Black and White audiences despite the tumultuous history of Richmond where statues of confederate soldiers line Monument Avenue in the center of the city. Specifically, From The Mississippi Delta (1997) and Inherit the Wind (1955) gave voice to the Black southern experience and therefore spoke to the entire community. A goal of the Jazz Actors Theatre was to “… present to diverse audiences a variety of plays by Black writers focusing most on those of social significance, challenging aesthetics and outstanding literary achievement.” Therefore, the notion of community and the specific population speaks to the inclusion of experiences in the Queer

306 Ibid.
Black Power Aesthetic framework. He educated the actors and audiences in all facets of Black Theatre. Mary Hodges, actor and director in New York, recalls the Jazz Actors Theatre emphasized community building in the ensemble within the context of Richmond: “There was a lot of building didactic with the community. I was in school. Ernie worked us to the bone. Asked us for 25-30 hours commitment and then class, rehearsal and administration. He worked hard at letting the community know the difference of the Black theatre that was relevant versus the coon shows or kitchen sink drama.”

Audience recruitment is always a challenge for theatres across the United States, and yet Ernie McClintock found his solution in educating actors and spectators in a city haunted by a confederate past.

The rehearsal process and consideration of the reciprocal actor-audience relationship carried through from Harlem to New York, and is grounded in Afrocentricity, connected to African storytelling. One of the books McClintock recommended to his Richmond pupils, Carlton W. and Barbara J. Molette’s Black Theater: Premise and Presentation, illuminates the connection of Afrocentricity, community, and theatre, a departure from the White training programs:

Afro-American actors must be able to perform as themselves and to portray other characters as well. An actor who is prepared to function effectively in Afrocentric theatre needs to be able to perform in way that move beyond the linear goal of recreating a character in a real life situation. Afrocentric theatre requires performance skills that allow the actor to perform as himself and to portray one or more characters within a single performance event. The Afro-American actor must accomplish this feat without resorting to the tactic of blocking the audience out of his

307 Hodges, interview.
308 Monica White Ndounou, “Early African American Theatre” (lecture, Tufts University, Medford, MA, September 13, 2012).
conscious awareness. After all, the actor must be able to perceive and respond to the audience behavior that occurs in response to the performance.\textsuperscript{309}

Conversely, in the White European theatre, realism and subsequently naturalism introduced the performance convention known as the fourth wall, in order to create the sense that the spectators are voyeurs peering in on the characters’ lives.\textsuperscript{310} The fourth wall is a theatrical concept that has been popular in storytelling for playwrights and directors into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. This theatrical convention translated into acting theory in terms of creating “naturalistic” characters that mirror human behavior and psychology. The Jazz Acting Technique was not based on naturalism, but on self-expression and the audience-community. African American theatres can trace their roots to African storytelling, which rarely considered an actor-audience division. There is a distinct awareness that all present are part of the communal experience. In the spirit of jazz riffing, the blurred lines between actor and spectator echoes jazz aesthetics in terms of call and response, as well as improvising in the moment.\textsuperscript{311}

Creating connections across the African Diaspora are tied to Molefi Asante’s theory of Afrocentricity, which acknowledges the intersections of gender, class, and race, and yet offers a moral and intellectual location that place Africans as subjects rather than objects in human history, in an effort to reclaim

\textsuperscript{309} Molette and Molette, \textit{Black Theater: Premise and Presentation}, 99.

\textsuperscript{310} Naturalism is a movement developed in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century from the novelist Emile Zola that aimed to recreate everyday life on stage in terms of sets, acting style, and limited theatricality. Refer to Zola’s essay “Naturalism on the Stage” for a more in depth study.

\textsuperscript{311} Call and Response is a succession of two distinct phrases derived form Sub-Saharan African cultures in which call and response is a dialogue in rituals and songs. The form developed into Gospel music, which is most visible in the Baptist Church community today. Monica White Ndounou. “Early African American Theatre” (lecture, Tufts University, Medford, MA, October 25, 2012).
cultural agency.\textsuperscript{312} Asante distinguished Africanity from Afrocentricity in that Africanity refers in its generality to all the customs, traditions, and traits of people of Africa and the diaspora. Afrocentricity seeks agency and action, a reliance of self-conscious action.\textsuperscript{313} Therefore, McClintock’s training and productions theatre are a prime example of how the arts has the potential to promote the Afrocentric point of view by placing “African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior.”\textsuperscript{314} The Afrocentric framework, in terms of theatre, removes the focus on Black artists serving the western Aristotelian theatre to address the specific needs of a community.

The Queer Black Power Aesthetic echoes the Black Aesthetic concepts of self-determination and community, however McClintock diverged from Baraka’s framework relating to the function of art as it relates to the actor and the primacy of destructing what Larry Neal refers to as “the white thing.”\textsuperscript{315} Regarding the social function of art, Larry Neal’s “The Black Arts Movement” emphasizes 1960s Black writers who reevaluated their relationship to western literature. McClintock evaluated the traditional role of acting and asserted that the actor’s role was not secondary to the writer or director. McClintock expanded the efficacy of art as a conduit for social change in his technique, promoting that which highlights the notion of self-determination. The agency of artistic creation leads to social change by exposing the audience to Black experiences without stereotypical representation, exposure that can reverse everyday racisms.

\textsuperscript{312} Asante, \textit{Afrocentric Idea Revised}, xiii.  
\textsuperscript{313} Ibid., 19.  
\textsuperscript{314} Ibid., 2.  
\textsuperscript{315} Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” 30.
Another variation in McClintock’s approach varies from the Black Aesthetic in terms of the strategy to destroy the White gaze. In particular, the Queer Black Power Aesthetic subverts the White gaze by integrating queer and womanist voices. This nuanced approach aligns with the Harlem Renaissance intellect Alain Locke, who rejected a primary focus on protest because it necessarily situates Black artists in an inferior position. Locke articulated, “Propaganda perpetuates the position of group inferiority even in crying out against it.”

The act of fostering Black actors’ individual expression inherently diverges from the western form. For example, by producing the work of Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and Ntozake Shange, he allowed space for a multitude of perspectives in his productions, which in turn ruptures the White heterosexual patriarchy.

However, individual self-expression does not deny commonality within the African diaspora. At the core, McClintock’s theoretical basis centers on self-expression and also a collective past. He started with the individual actor to reach collective consciousness. Before an actor can reach the collective or draw on a shared past, one must emanate from the self. As Niglun Andalou-Okur articulates, “Collectivity is not meant to be anti-individualistic, it is rather the ability to reach the collective consciousness of the people. Transformation begins when the actor first appears on the stage. What follows is a new awareness, an

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awakening into reality.” Through representing various points of view from varying African American lived experiences, the actors find common ground with the audience. In other words, “the artist or the poet speaks to the community and for the community- his/her art is therefore functional, responsible and collective.” Andalou-Okur’s point of view bridges the individual experience and speaks to those three goals, articulated by Ron Karenga.

One of the most striking ways Ernie McClintock conflicted with Amiri Baraka’s ideology relates to Black militant groups’ attempt to affirm Black masculinity and dominance, distancing the Black Aesthetic from femininity and homosexuality. For example in Amiri Baraka’s 1969 “Babylon Revisited” he infamously wrote, “The bitch killed a friend of mine named Bob Thompson a Black painter, a giant, once she reduced him to a pitiful imitation faggot…” As E. Patrick Johnson notes, this strategy worked to signify that Black masculinity and heterosexuality are authentic, whereas Black homosexuality is trivial, ineffectual, and inauthentic. Of course, without the homosexual other, there is no masculine heterosexual Black male. The dilemma of identity, stereotypes of aggression, and the emasculation of a Black gay male, connects to a collective past of humiliation and denigration on the slave block. Although there are differences in opinion regarding the legitimacy of what constitutes Black masculinity (gay/straight, masculine/feminine), Baraka and McClintock shared common goals: Community

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318 Ibid., 420.
building, art for social change, Black pride, and reaching constituencies that are denied access to theatre and education.

Following the 1960s, Black scholars and practitioners contested the Black Aesthetic in that it excluded female voices, but many overlook McClintock’s contributions. One scholar, Gayle Addison Jr. problematized the monolithic nature of the Black Aesthetic and attributed its limitations to the essentialist philosophy. From the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, essentialism poses that particular attributes that are necessary to define a particular entity. Critics of the Black Aesthetic argue that the issue with essentialism, or the belief that there is one definition of what defines Blackness, works to put differences at the very center of the discussion, in order to destabilize an essentialist approach. However, the Queer Black Power Aesthetic recognizes a collective African American memory and accesses ancestry to include a common thread in the African diaspora, to unite differing backgrounds and experiences.

With regards to the feminist critiques, the Queer Black Power Aesthetic supports Nikki Giovanni’s criticism of the singular Black Aesthetic, which argues that Black Art should follow the simple formula of including all Black voices, male and female. Giovanni contends that the militant mentality fundamentally opposes the plight of the artist. The Black militant framework that solely promotes a masculine, heterosexual agenda invalidates women’s experiences.

However, she says, “… the most important and valid aspect of cultural nationalism would be the support of other Black cultural ventures, especially when one cultural function is funded by the same White folks who fund the group being put down.” Paradoxically, the 1960s Black radicalism that absorbed militancy inspired by the very military system that oppressed people of color. Furthermore, the absence of female voices, repressed by a militant ideology, prevents cultural nationalism from coming to fruition.

Specifically, the Queer Black Power Aesthetic recognizes the gender-based inequities common to all women of color, yet simultaneously promotes the agency of Black female performers to speak from their individual experiences. As bell hooks explores, the objectification of Black women can be traced back to the 19th century where Whites projected a narrative of sexualization on Black bodies, disassociated from Whiteness. Stereotypes associated with Black women’s aggression and deviant sexuality are still deeply embedded in American culture. McClintock did not necessarily create forums to discuss women’s rights in his theatre per se, but he provided space for Black women to take ownership of their minds and bodies. For example, McClintock produced a poetry theatre where five women wrote their own text and performed in many neighborhoods in New York City over several months. Bolanyle Edwards, an early member of the Afro-American Studio’s poetry theatre, still remembers her piece, entitled “Pussy Poem”:

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322 Ibid.
324 Ibid.
Shit. The world is full of pussies.
Black pussy, white pussy, yellow pussy.
Pussy, pussy, pussy.
All you got to do is be cool.

Although she contends, “It’s not a nice poem,” the performance made lasting impressions on audiences.326 She recalls after the poetry performance became popular, many New York fans memorized the lyrics and recited the poem along with her. For this reason, the Pussy Poem demonstrates McClintock’s ability to open a space for women to express even a taboo subject matter. The technique’s foundational component of actors’ self-acceptance could be a painful process, but it led to liberation in performance and from the patriarchal gaze. Essentially, Black women were afforded a space to express womanist perspectives in both scripted and unscripted work.

325 Bolanyle Edwards, interview.
326 Ibid.
McClintock’s alignment with Black Power ideology and his own lived experience as a Black queer man created an entry point in practice for womanist voices in a theatrical space. Although Black queer men and Black women encounter different challenges and discriminations, there is a commonality of exclusion from a male heterosexual construct. Womanism established by Alice Walker in her 1983 book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* is defined as, “… a social change perspective rooted in Black women’s and other women of color’s everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension.”

In the performances of the “Pussy Poem,” McClintock’s womanist actors asserted themselves in everyday spaces on the streets of Harlem, empowering other women in their urban environment, and connected to the Black female spirit.

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Poetry Theatre’s performances in everyday spaces in the 1960s and 1970s directly harkened to Alice Walker’s call for Black women to problem solve in every day spaces and resort the balance between people and their environment. Notably, Womanism is a framework distinguished from feminism in that “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.” As Layli Philips articulates in her anthology, womanism’s link to gender is that “race/class/gender matrix that is Black womanhood, serves as the origin point for a speaking position.” To conflate womanism and feminism, and/or assert womanism as a version of feminism would detract from the particular positionality of Black women and their autonomy.

Figure 5: Afro-American Studio Poetry Theatre.
Source: From the Private Collection of Al Mitchell.

McClintock’s queer identity in the context of the 1960s situated him to welcome alternative points of view that are equally representative of the Black

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Arts Movement. The spirit and practice of inclusion in the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech is a distinguishing factor that set McClintock apart from other companies in Harlem:

Ernie set out to be inclusive. The old, a woman in her 70s- she admitted to being a prostitute in Alaska and Madame. A young girl not quite mature- he included everyone. If you came and he saw something in you, he wanted to make sure you stayed, no matter what your skin color was. I think that’s what set us a part and from that- there was strength to be had because it wasn’t just a stereotype formed.\(^{331}\)

Furthermore, Black Masculinity within the African American community is a fraught subject especially considering the 1960s Black Power movement’s association with homophobia. The act of bringing Baraka’s homophobic viewpoint to the forefront provides an opportunity to confront the skewed conception that Black masculinity is defined as militant, aggressive, straight, and male-focused. However, McClintock was able to still advocate for the principles of the Black Power movement while simultaneously promoting inclusive perspectives.

McClintock’s theoretical framework rebels against categorization and his productions follow suit in terms of versatility in form and content. Every production did not subscribe to a particular formula or set of guidelines in the theoretical sense. There are strains of multiple aesthetics present in even revolutionary productions because as a director he considered the individual interpretation and creation of character in all his theatrical endeavors.

\(^{331}\) Helmar Cooper, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, May 29, 2016.
Queer Black Power Aesthetic: Political or A-Political?

In practice, McClintock produced over two hundred productions across four decades based on a repertory model, whereby many supposed outdated plays from the Black Arts Movement remained in his canon into the 21st century. In the contemporary theatre, Black plays from the 1960s are rarely revived due to complicated issues including what Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins refers to as “false universalism,” the rhetoric of colorblindness, institutionalized racism, and the history of the Great White Way. More frequently, theatres produce Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), a pre-revolutionary play, Baraka’s *Dutchman* (1964), a Black revolutionary drama, and Ntozake Shange’s *For colored girls who consider suicide/ when the rainbow is not enuf* (1974), a post-revolutionary choreopoem. These three plays are important for students to read and companies to perform, but limiting the representation of Black Theatre to these three works does not consider the breadth of plays within the movement. Moreover, given America’s contemporary political moment, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement to contest police brutality and refute stereotypes, the revolutionary genre speaks to social activists and activist-artists. McClintock’s remounting of protest plays, decades after their theatrical premieres

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332 False universalism is closely aligned with power relations, in which “theatre” is not labeled “white theatre.” Hence, theatre primarily compromised of whites creates a false universalism in the entertainment industry. The rhetoric of colorblindness is a view of the world that resists talking of race because to do so is to perpetuate racism. Although colorblind casting is helpful in terms of providing opportunities to actors of color, the plays are from a Eurocentric model in content and structure. Monica White Ndounou. “Introduction” (lecture, Tufts University, Medford, MA, September 9, 2012).
suggests that he intuitively knew the struggle for equality would continue, and therefore religiously committed to educating and empowering his communities. Through the Queer Black Power Aesthetic lens, Amiri Baraka’s *Great Goodness of Life (a coon show)* (1966) and McClintock’s *Where Its At- 70* (1969) demonstrate the self-determination and community in the context of 1960s and 1970s Harlem.

Even though McClintock did not identify as a member of the Black Panther Party, his approach echoes Black Power philosophy, especially considering his reverence for Malcolm X and the integration of Baraka’s plays to teach the Jazz Acting Technique. The term Black Power, coined by leader Stokely Carmichael in his June 16, 1966 speech, has been described by historian Peniel Joseph as “… a political, economic and cultural self-determination, as a vehicle for achieving radical democracy in America. [Carmichael] proposed Black Power as both a political philosophy and a radical framework for expanding democracy through local political power.”

From a theatrical perspective, the revolutionary genre forced political change at a local level. McClintock’s underlying revolutionary act started with educating his people about their shared past and collective memory. Through this education, the theatre promoted a sense of pride and mobilized a community to make changes that impact their economic and political reality.

The revolutionary genre includes a diverse collection of plays from writers including Ed Bullins, Richard Wesley, N. R. Davidson, and Sonia Sanchez, who

collectively disrupted the western style of storytelling. Articles published in *New York Times*, the *New York Amsterdam News*, *The Richmond Planet*, *the Richmond Afro-American*, the *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), the *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), the *Tri-State Defender* (New York), *Style Weekly* (Richmond), *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, and the *Black Theatre Alliance* magazine all illustrate the ramifications of the White western aesthetic on the Black Theatre. Aside from the limitations of the Aristotelian model, the White critics do not have a vocabulary or the context to understand the Black Aesthetic or multiple aesthetics. Furthermore, the White establishment produced programs such as the *Amos ‘n’ Andy* show, originally blackface minstrel radio show set in Harlem in the mid 1950s. Therefore, White critics’ experience of Black performance in television and theatre is what Clayton Riley refers to as “musical fantasies, inane stupefying comedies, and what tries to pass for [drama].” Riley contended that the consequences of this narrow selection resulted in “professional and artistic standards are being compromised for the sake of Black plays, playwrights and actors; standards of writing, production, performance, and judgment are being lowered for Blacks.” This broad generalization overlooks actors who subverted stereotypes within a role, much like Monica White Ndounou discusses in “Early Black Americans on Broadway.” However, stereotypes such as the Coon,

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334 Monica White Ndounou. “Harlem Renaissance” (lecture, Tufts University, Medford, MA, September 27, 2012).
336 Ibid.
Mammy, Black Buck, and Uncle Tom persisted in popular entertainment.\textsuperscript{338} White critics’ lack of understanding of Black Aesthetics and Black theater in general resulted in McClintock refusing to assimilate to the commercial theatre that produced Eurocentric stories and perpetuated stereotypes.

For example, Richmond-based critic Roy Proctor of the \textit{Richmond Times-Dispatch}, applauded aspects of McClintock’s productions, yet he criticized productions based on his White gaze. In 2001 McClintock directed Keith Glover’s \textit{Coming of the Hurricane} (1994) at the Barksdale Theatre in the round. Glover’s play takes place in 1877 Baitertown, Maryland during Reconstruction. Crixus, a newly freed slave and “cutter,” is dealing with confusion and anger of the post-war south. Pre-emancipation, cutters were slaves whose masters put in fights until the slave was too mangled to continue or was killed in the process, which have been compared to modern day dogfights.\textsuperscript{339} John “The Hurricane” Blaine is a White boxer who sets out to make life worse for former slaves in order to avenge the defeated, pro-slavery Confederacy. The play, which McClintock staged in the round in a roped-off theatre, concludes with a bloody fight comprising of forty-nine rounds.

McClintock’s directorial vision of \textit{Coming of the Hurricane} opened with a Sudanese tribal dance, led by actor Zaria Griffin, and described by one reviewer as “an emotional in-gathering for the story that is about to unfold.”\textsuperscript{340} Throughout the play, Griffin’s character that emerged from McClintock’s imagination looms

\textsuperscript{338} Bogle, \textit{Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & and Bucks}, 7-19.
\textsuperscript{340} Unsigned review of \textit{Coming of the Hurricane}, Barksdale Theatre, Richmond, \textit{The Progress-Index}, n.d.
over the scenes, and as an African ancestor, watches over Crixus and represents a shared history, a tenacity of spirit that connects to the greater African diaspora.

Griffin then appears as the written character “Shadow Jack,” a former slave in his 50s who works at the same general store as Crixus.

In Proctor’s review, he failed to acknowledge the connection between Griffin’s double casting as the Sudanese tribal leader and Shadow Jack, and critiqued McClintock’s conception without investigating the play itself as well as his Eurocentric bias. Proctor specifically assesses the play on Aristotelian standards even when he applauds McClintock for the staging because it tapped into “the power of a Greek tragedy.” He then criticizes the playwright for the Sudanese ritual woven into the play, which is not in the original script, but a product of McClintock’s artistic interpretation. He wrote, “Blame Glover” that “… too little transpire[d] between the Sudanese ritual and the Maryland fight.” He further critiques the play for flashes of poetry alongside long speeches that slow the “action” of the play. The action of a play speaks to the traditional Aristotelian structure which defines the tragedy as “an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting proper purgation of these emotions.” However, other critics in the Richmond area,

342 Ibid.
who have a comprehensive understanding of McClintock’s form and content acknowledge how the production connects the collective and historical memory with the present: “Woven into a theatrical fabric that is as colorful as the native African cloth are the strands of the historical times of painful poverty, Black-White angst, a rolling national political pot, which all together create a story that is frightfully convincing.” Proctor’s critique through his White gaze, compared to other reviews, reveals a very different theatrical experience. The success of commercial productions depends on these reviews in order to increase audiences, with the goal of increasing profits for the producers.

Rather than directly challenging the commercial theatre, McClintock focused his energy on his community, and by focusing on African American culture, history, and experiences, his productions necessarily ruptured “the white thing.” The context of New York is of particular importance considering the history of the Harlem Renaissance and the vibrant tradition of Black Art in the metropolis. Furthermore, “Black Americans have little reason to be satisfied with the mainstream performing arts, which seldom addresses themselves to the serious ills of the society, and almost never explore the problems of Afro-American life.” In New York, McClintock and his contemporaries explored the social ills of society because they interconnected to racism, which works to block the individuals from understanding Africanity. Therefore, by engaging in

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344 Jerrell Sorbet, review of Coming of the Hurricane, by Keith Glover, directed by Ernie McClintock, Barksdale Theatre, Richmond, n.d.
345 Larry Neal defines the “white thing” in terms of white ideas and white ways of looking at the world. Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” 31.
347 Ibid., 3.
the exploration of Afrocentricity, Black Culture, and Black pride, his productions ruptured the White western aesthetic.

Although McClintock’s actor training and productions were revolutionary acts in Harlem, particular sects of the Harlem community viewed McClintock as a-political, even though his play selection and effect on the community prove otherwise. A. Peter Bailey observed this opinion in the Harlem community:

Director McClintock and the Studio have been accused of not being political enough despite the fact that their productions are by and about Black people. They aren’t necessarily revolutionary productions and non-revolutionary productions, although both tendencies in the Black theatre movement need to be encouraged and supported and both need to develop theatrical forms which will appeal to the Black masses.348

The assertion that they are neither revolutionary nor non-revolutionary suggests that they live in the framework of the Queer Black Power Aesthetic: Individual expression drives the political implications of the play rather the politics informing the individual. Furthermore, Marc Primus asserts that this accusation was aimed at McClintock because of his queer identity. Primus asserts, “The Afro-American Studio was formed and created by gay people, it was a gay place. It was certainly not acceptable to the radicals of the Black Arts Movement. Of course it was political. It was more political than they ever hoped to be … We didn’t even talk about it but we all agreed that we were going to create a Black Cultural system.”349 The company did not hold meetings to discuss the mission of the studio or the political implications of their work. Rather, the identity of the Afro-American Studio and 127th Street Repertory Ensemble organically evolved

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349 Primus, interview.
with like-minded artists, committed to telling the stories of lived Black experiences without censorship or pretension. Therefore, Primus’ assessment confirms the commitment of the company to develop Black actors and establish a company known for artistic excellence in Harlem, which created that Black cultural system.

In a 1978 interview, McClintock said that actors must learn about their ancestors who survived, and access the strength and pride of their African identity, which results in the actors approaching the craft with reverence and respect. The Studio recruited actors who would be committed, disciplined, and focused on their intellectual and artistic growth, evidenced by their description of the studio: “In the Harlem community, there should be a place where an aspiring actor can study under a planned curriculum with an emphasis on Afro-American Culture and History.” The statement communicated to a prospective student within the Harlem community that the mission of the school was to nurture a Black actor in the contemporary moment. Additionally, the call emphasized that the student is a member of the greater community who shares African ancestry.

**Great Goodness of Life (a coon show)**

Due to the politically charged context of the Black Arts Movement and the community’s efforts to demand equality in the face of White supremacy, Amiri Baraka’s plays gave artists and audiences a platform to contest White prejudice. Baraka, the patriarch of the Black Revolutionary Theatre, unapologetically

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351 Ibid.
expressed frustration and rage while promoting anarchy in his early work such as *Great Goodness of Life* (*a coon show*) (1967). The play originally premiered at the Amiri Baraka’s Spirit House in Newark, New Jersey in November 1967, and Baraka directed the production, a common practice for the poet. The one-act play is part of Baraka’s *Four Black Revolutionary Plays* along with *Experimental Death Unit #1, A Black Mass,* and *Madheart.* The nightmare-like play follows the character “Court Royal,” a post office employee charged with harboring a criminal, yet maintains his innocence. After several attempts to convince “the Voice” of his innocence, he is surrounded by several ominous hooded characters in business suits, and reverberations of clanking chains and blood-curdling screams. Finally, this nightmare disparages the Court Royal’s resolve to the point where he agrees to shoot another victim in exchange for exoneration. Tragically, he shoots a nameless face, and before the boy dies cries out, “Papa.” The play ends in the “real world” where Court Royal is back in his living room looking for his bowling back. The echoes of slavery, political action, chaos, and White capitalist oppression speaks to the rage and anger of the time period, experienced by Black Americans, including members of the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech.

Through the Afrocentric lens, community and shared experience relate to McClintock’s revival of Baraka’s work from the 1960s well into the 1970s because Baraka’s voice tapped into the collective urgency to fight the hegemony. Each individual’s experience of oppression varies, but finding a common enemy in the institution of oppression can unite Black artists to fight injustice. Notably,
the second staging of *Great Goodness of Life* was part of the series “The Baraka Festival,” inaugurated at the Theatre Center located 415 West 127th Street theatre, which eventually became the home of the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble. The space, a former brewery, measured 20,000 square feet that also hosted art exhibits showcasing the local artists, music performances, dance performers, and poetry readings. The diversity of artistic expression found common ground at the Theatre Centre and gave a voice to young, eager artists united in one space to fight the hegemony and tell their individual stories.

The 127th Street Repertory Ensemble organized “The Baraka Festival” as part of the repertory system, an uncommon model for other Black Arts theatres of the generation. *Experimental Death Unit #1, Junkies are full of sh...*, and *Great Goodness of Life*, premiered at the Theatre Centre on September 22, 23, and 24 followed by the second part of the program *Madheart* and *A Black Mass*, which opened Thursday September 28, 1972. After the premieres, the productions moved into the repertory cycle on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. The massive space housed two theatres seating 250 and 100 persons respectively. The gallery space for special events transformed into classrooms and trained actors in Common Sense Acting technique. Furthermore, the Black Theatre Alliance used the space for scenery workshops. The Centre reflected the ideals of Ernie McClintock and the Black Power belief in establishing community-centered organizations that would celebrate Black life, and inspire the neighborhood to work towards a more productive and equal society. Gwendolen Hardwick

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observed that McClintock gave a voice to these stories of outrage, bringing large numbers of Black folks together from the community, an undeniable political act. 353

Figure 6: “Professional Theatre Training with Soul: Afro-American Studio for Acting and Speech Fall 1971.”

Source: Pamphlet of course offerings from the Private Collection of Elizabeth Cizmar.

The Afro-American Studio Advanced Workshops were the early iteration of the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble professional company, in which the productions of the plays were a tool to teach the technique, and also train the actors to apply the technique in performance. Many of the actors such as Al Mitchell who is now a successful television and film actor in Atlanta, did not pursue training before training with McClintock. He describes rehearsals for plays such as Great Goodness of Life, as part of the training: “As we were going through rehearsal, he would go through the teaching process. Because a lot of us were new, didn’t have much acting training so part of the rehearsal process was

353 Hardwick, interview.
working long hours.” Long hours for all of his pupils and actors remained a consistent practice at all stages of McClintock’s career. The course offerings for the Advanced Workshops listed in the pamphlet marketing the school’s offerings demonstrates that rehearsals for the productions were part of the larger curriculum to synthesize Stretching Out, Speech, Vocal Technique, Movement, and Scene Study into the performances.

In a 1972 review of the Afro-American Studio’s workshop productions of Baraka’s *Experimental Death Unit #1, Junkies are full of (Sh…),* and *Great Goodness of Life,* the New York Times critic Mel Gussow favored McClintock’s direction of *Junkies…* as “most adept, hits at drug evils.” However, in a review of the *Great Goodness,* directed by McClintock’s protégé Woody Carter, the critique assessed the play as the “most ambitious and the most pretentious play of the evening… The defendant is psychologically beaten into submission and then offered salvation if he will execute another Black man, who may or may not represent the committed militant. The message is murky, but the atmosphere is threatening.” Aside from his critique of Baraka’s text and preference for a perhaps familiar play connecting Black lives with drugs and criminality, the observation of a threatening environment speaks to the effectiveness of the technique.

One of the ways the technique created such an ominous environment can be traced back to one of the earliest exercises, Activities. For the first step in the

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354 Mitchell, interview.
Activities exercise, the student brings, a perhaps mundane, activity to the classroom and performs it before the class. From that point, McClintock would push students to further establish the conditions of the activity. Suavae Mitchell, who was frequently cast in the Afro-American Baraka plays explains:

What are you doing? I’m preparing dinner, or getting dressed. Want to see your business. Because when you are sitting there talking to somebody you are doing something. You aren’t just sitting there talking… Then he would see what you would bring and then he would get you to think about what you WOULD be doing. So why are you standing there? What business are you engaging with? What time of day is it? What’s the weather like? What are your environmental circumstances? If you are outside, is it cold? What would you be doing? All those things. Take advantage of those and let me see how much you can tell us without the lines and what’s going on in the space and the environment.

The added level of outside conditions such as the cold weather, the time of day, and so forth result in the actor performing that activity in a specified way that engenders behavior based on who they are as an individual. For example, if an actor is not a morning person and they are performing that activity at 6am in the dead of winter in a room without heat, versus six o’clock at night in a warm space, the activity of getting dressed could portray an agitated and hurried state of being. Furthermore, performing the activity without words, and then in rehearsal without text, emphasizes the environment and physical manifestation of the character.

McClintock mentored student director Woody Carter and in 1972 for his Master’s Thesis from City College in New York, Carter directed *Great Goodness of Life* in a particular environment, a classroom. Carter explained “I knew very

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356 After training with McClintock, Carter continued to direct in New York and California. He graduated with a Ph.D. from Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. His book *Theology for a*
early on if I put the play in a classroom, and the room was so small. Most of the class was White and had very limited experience of Black theatre, so let me bring it to them and put them in it, that they were not spectators.”

Carter maintained the same cast, which included actor Helmar Cooper as the judge because the ensemble and trust had been established at the Afro-American Studio. The effect of this everyday classroom environment on the audience, when the play began, initiated a realization that they were the jury deciding the fate of “Royal Court”.

In terms of the Black Power component of the Queer Black Power Aesthetic, Carter and his contemporaries explained that the mission of the theatre did not glorify violence or encourage anarchy, but rather produced complex and truthful plays that told stories by and about Black people- “the good, the bad and the ugly.”

This relates to the McClintock Queer Black Power Aesthetic in terms of selecting a variety of plays in the breadth of Black experiences, to bring one’s experience of Blackness to the stage and connect with the community, whether the production was a structured text or street performance poetry. Carter noted that politics or political awareness was not the concern of the company:

We had a role as part of the Black Power movement. We weren’t on the front lines, but as Black people in Black arts our role was to portray, clarify, explore the Black experience so that they could have a better understanding of themselves in relation to their place in time, in terms of history and contemporary America. It was our responsibility through theater.

Violent Age was published in 2010 by iUniverse. For sixteen years he served as the President and CEO of the Bay Area United Fund in Oakland, California. McClintock had a tremendous impact on his career in terms of educational theatre and in his personal life he said acting taught him “We have the ability to stand up for ourselves.” Carter, interview.

357 Ibid.
358 Ibid.
359 Ibid.
His statement echoes the work of scholar Alain Locke in that if the artist starts with self-expression, then political change will follow in the community. In other words, one cannot focus on the politics of a play or the persuasion, but rather the genuine experience and moment-to-moment work to invigorate the audience, and therefore educate and speak in unison with the community.

In 1973, after Baraka’s popularity in the theatre declined in part due to his misogynist rhetoric and the poet’s relocation to Newark, New Jersey, A. Peter Bailey wrote in *Black World* magazine, “If you wanted to see some Imamu Amiri Baraka plays that you might have missed, the place to go was the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech … I salute the Studio for bringing them to Harlem.”

McClintock was not aligned with misogynist statements in these plays, but undeniably Baraka’s poetry language embodied on stage, challenged, and/or empowered students. Helmar Cooper suspects that McClintock was also proud that his company could perform anything under his tutelage, from Shakespeare to Baraka. Furthermore, “Ernie was seduced constantly by the magic of language. Maybe you say something I don’t like but look how magnificently you are saying it. Look at the words, how powerful that statement is. Maybe that power is something I can use. Maybe that power is not the way to go. So let me do this play and make it clear, for example, the character hates women. Let’s see what the audience thinks.”

Although the popularity of one-act Baraka plays had declined in Black theatres in Harlem, McClintock kept them in his repertory cycle, to use them to teach the technique, and also to teach the

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361 Cooper, interview.
students to find agency and, as Carter said, stand up for themselves. Including Baraka in the repertory speaks to the core principle of the Queer Black Power Aesthetic of self-determination, and his plays served one of the fundamental goals of the technique, for actors to unearth their self worth and assert their agency, telling stories of lived Black experiences.

*Where It’s At – 70*

In a 1970 interview with Doris Freedman on “Artists in the City,” a weekly radio show introducing up and coming artists in the city, Ernie McClintock begins the interview situating his street theatre production *Where It’s At – 70* within Harlem’s politically charged environment. McClintock references the civil unrest in 1970, which points to American citizens’ reckoning with Richard Nixon’s presidency for two years. As a result of Nixon’s administration, many theatres were shut down due to slashing of federal funding in the arts. Furthermore, the economy grew stagnant and America’s continued involvement in the Vietnam War propelled Americans to protest for peace. McClintock boldly brought theatre to the streets in this volatile climate. *Where It’s At – 70* involved each cast member writing, creating, or choosing their own material ranging from dance, poetry, and music. The only criteria for the material was that it had to emanate from the experience of living in the current conditions, in their Harlem community. For example, the Afro-American Studio’s neighbor was Columbia

University, and in 1968 the administration built a new gymnasium in Harlem and tried to institute an entrance for the “coloreds” which resulted in a protest, followed by an outbreak of violence, and concluded with police intervention.\textsuperscript{365}

Furthermore, the Black Panthers became a national target of the authorities where 29 were killed and hundreds imprisoned. The Afro-American Studio’s actors and students in Harlem were surrounded by and saturated in political chaos, which inevitably informed their work.

McClintock summed up the actors and the content of the production, acknowledging the volatile circumstances experienced everyday by the students. \textit{Where It's At-70} was “a reaction of Black people to their environment.”\textsuperscript{366} He produced the devised production “over and over again, even in Richmond” according to Marc Primus.\textsuperscript{367} Since the inception of the studio in 1966 until 2002, he developed these soul-infused devised performances. In 2002 he produced \textit{Ndangered 2002} based on issues facing African American males including incarceration, the absence of a father in family life, peer pressure, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, and racism. Another piece, \textit{The Rose That Grew From Concrete}, consisted of the writings of the late Tupac Shakur through African dance, modern dance, and ballet choreographed by Ronald K. Brown, and hip-hop themed soliloquies, accompanied by a two-man percussion and guitar ensemble alongside Shakur’s words.\textsuperscript{368} Richmond journalist Holly Mrodriguez review

\textsuperscript{367} Primus, interview.
praised both pieces and in particular The Rose “… created an experience that carried the audience through a roller coaster of emotions from happiness and excitement to fear and loneliness, and at the end peace.” The development of poetry theatre honors the actors as creators of their own stories, and from their lived experiences within the structure of a collective ensemble.

The legacy of his devised productions spoke to audiences because the issues addressed within each piece reflected the concerns of the community, and in terms of Where Its At-70, McClintock said he had never seen a more politically oriented version. The production toured the enclaves of neighborhoods in Harlem, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and in Manhattan. In the radio interview, McClintock retells with delight a memory of the cast setting up the stage, singing familiar folk songs, and locals of a community joining in song, which became a new communal performance. McClintock’s revolutionary theatrical bent, one could say, was a result of the historical moment of the time, and the actors lived experiences as Black Harlemites directly reached New York residents.

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369 Ibid.
370 Williams, Black Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s, 48.
McClintock brought his company to the streets in unconventional pieces such as *Where Its At- 70*, to connect with the community, a critical aspect of the Queer Black Power Aesthetic. He recognized the sharp contrast between an enclosed theatre and outdoor open space, which at times disoriented his actors. Mance Williams’s account of the Black Arts Movement noted that part of McClintock’s early work in street theatre served the actor to maintain the artistic standards of the production, while responding to the reactions of the audience, presumably referencing *Where It’s At – 70*. The outcome resulted in immediate identification with strangers in unexpected circumstances and locations. The production affirms Marc Primus’s belief that the Studio became a healing temple.

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371 Ibid.
for the actors, and they spread that healing spirit to many facets of New York. Stripping away the pretention often associated with theatre in the context of an exclusive space with a proscenium arc, provided an effective way to draw in new audiences while also serving their brothers and sisters. Essentially, *Where It’s At* – 70 took the form of an essential traveling community center, reminiscent of Black Panther’s mission and hands on approach to community building.

*Spell no. 7*

Undoubtedly, the American theatre privileges male-centered scripted drama over female storytelling, and yet in McClintock’s theatre, he provided opportunities for women’s voices through non-traditional performances and in plays from established womanist writers, including ntozake shange and Dr. Endesha Ida Mae Holland. As far as self-created work, McClintock and his female cast in Richmond devised theatre in a production called *The Collard Greens: Contributions by Cornbread Divas* based on Winnie Mandela’s book. Mary Hodges recalls the process of creating the work: “He made you believe you are excellent and even when you go through life and people try to tell you that you are mediocre when you know you aren’t. So being not afraid of who you are.”372 This assessment echoes scholar William D. Wright’s charge: “…in order to open up space for Black Female Voice in Black Aesthetic culture, and in the construction of a Black Aesthetic under which the Black Female Voice will speak

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372 Hodges, interview.
on the basis of equality with the Black Male Voice in both categories. I would nuance Wright’s call in that there are a canon of plays by Black female writers including the work of Angela Weld Grimke and Georgia Douglas Johnson. Although producers have historically overlooked them, contemporary directors such as Nicole Hodges Persley are remedying their erasure. Persley recently directed and staged a successful production of Grimke’s play *Rachel* and much like McClintock, Persley connects Black histories to America’s current political climate. I argue that McClintock’s devoted female following is attributed to his equal consideration of the woman’s voice and commitment to artistic excellence. McClintock’s productions of ntozake shange’s *spell no. 7* (1979) and Dr. Endesha Ida Mae Holland’s *From the Mississippi Delta* (1992) met his high standards, despite a male-dominated industry. Shange and Holland’s unique perspectives in these productions moved audiences and critics based on their individual stories, and McClintock’s vision embodied self-determination, community, and through the womanist voice, subverted stereotypes.

In 1982, the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble produced *spell no. 7* alongside Peter Schaffer’s *Equus* (1973) and Derek Walcott’s *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1970) at The Renny Theatre in Harlem. This program exemplifies McClintock’s the Queer Black Power Aesthetic with three distinct perspectives in storytelling. As demonstrated in publicity materials, the advertisement of the

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repertory season includes all three of these points of view in one space. shange describes *spell no. 7* as “… in the throes of pain and sensation experienced by my characters responding to the involuntary constriction of their humanity.”

shange’s piece tells the story of three actors, one musician, one amateur performer, two singers, and an amateur performer who are guided by a magician to come to terms with their identity, despite a White oppressive society. To come to terms with their individual struggles with the White gaze, they confront the grotesque stereotypes and the spell of the magician is really the magic and richness of their Blackness. As shange notes in her foreword, White critics and audiences were overwhelmed by the intensity and grotesque nature of the piece. These opinions were formed by the overt distortion of English “… with intentions of outdoing the White man.”

Scholars such as Tejumola Olaniyan, Mikell Pinkney, and Karen Cronacher have explored her use of poetry and language, a critical component in her writing; more specifically, shange’s unique disruption of White Aristotelian structure. Through the lens of Queer Black Power Aesthetic, I will focus on the notion of disrupting western conceptions of beauty, which manifested through the Jazz Acting Technique. *spell no. 7*, identified as a choreopoem, confronted the oppression of the western gaze on performers in order to self-heal, a cornerstone of Ernie McClintock’s acting technique, which came to life before audiences.

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376 Ibid., 3.
Initially, McClintock was not interested in *spell no.7*, but his opinion changed after reading and exploring the humanity of Shange’s characters. He diverged from the Public Theater’s 1979 production in that he removed the references to Blackface minstrelsy. When he saw the original production, he was less than enthusiastic due to the antiquated minstrel act, which he found overshadowed the production. Helmar Cooper, the studio’s voice teacher and actor, urged McClintock to read the choreopoem and the director connected with the characters: “…I thought about it and I read it again and I discovered that the play was about these actors, who hung out in a bar. About them dealing with their life, their experiences in the theatre, their dreams, desires, frustrations and fantasies. It is really about Black performers and their experiences in New
The story spoke to McClintock’s initial desire to create a theatre and training program for Black actors based on their lived experiences within a space free from the White gaze.

One of the major themes in the play, and production wrestles with, is the vexed controversy of Black female beauty, a debate dating back to the Harlem Renaissance. lou [sic], the magician, observes, “anyway, the whole world knows European & non-European alike/the whole world knows that nobody love the black woman like they love farrah fawcett-majors. the whole word don’t turn out for a dead black woman like they did for marilyn monroe [sic]”

lou references Farrah Fawcett and Marilyn Monroe, blonde-haired blue-eyed, fair sex symbols who set standards of beauty in Hollywood. These icons of American sexuality perpetuated by the media, prevented Black women from certain casting opportunities because of the hue of their skin, and naturally grown hair.

In spell no. 7, Black women’s hairstyles are a signifier of beauty and the play explored the judgments placed on the legitimacy of natural hair versus chemically straightened hair. Historically, during the New Negro Women’s Movement in the Harlem Renaissance many women straightened their hair and wore it in a bouffant, resembling the Gibson Girl, a popular White icon.

During this time period, the styles also included clothing, button-up blouses to promote the notion of the New Negro Woman who should represent a God-fearing, moral, and clean woman of society. Post-Harlem Renaissance, many

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378 Shange, 100.
Black women were criticized for absorbing the White culture in dress and hairstyles, and perhaps denying their African heritage. But as scholar Shirley Ann Tate notes, “… there is a long standing myth that straight/processed hair means Black self-hatred.” In terms of how the Queer Black Power Aesthetic champions individuality, attempting to restrict a woman’s wardrobe or style detracts from freedom of self-expression.

As a reaction to the 1940s and 1950s, which revealed a trend in processed hair, the 1960s saw a reawakening of Africanity where many women and men wanted to return to their African roots, fashioning dashikis and Pan-African styles along with their natural Afros and textured hair. This departure from the straight style resulted in debates that essentially address issues beyond looks. In 1969, Nikki Giovanni urged her readers that “Our enemy is Look and Life, not Ebony [magazine]” and insisted that all women with or without a natural and dashiki should be welcomed. Shange explores this dilemma of beauty and McClintonck highlighted this in a performance acknowledged in Yusef A. Salaam’s review: “One, powerful revealing scene in the play dealt with the Black woman’s hang-ups about her hair. … the good/straight-curly-long hair syndrome has plagued African women in America for centuries, driving many to the point of psychosis.” Salaam is referencing Lily who brushes her hair 100 times a day. Although McClintonck did not have the lived experience of a woman, the technique necessitated actresses to tap into their lived experience in the context of New York, an epicenter of superficial beauty and fashion.

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As Marc Primus discussed, the school and company healed the students and affirmed African American identity, and in 1982, the cast were veterans of the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble where the application of the Common Sense technique brought spell no. 7 to life in the jazz ensemble framework. One of the foundational elements of the technique was, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, the notion of self-acceptance and freedom. Bolanyle Edwards, who played maxine, echoes this philosophy in teaching today at the Tupac Center in Atlanta. In the beginner classes, Bolanyle recalls, “He had this one exercise called Stretching out” where we would lie on the floor and roll over each other. All over each other.\textsuperscript{381} She contends that for high school students, such an exercise is not appropriate, but the notion behind Stretching Out is creating trust among the ensemble, which is especially significant in an ensemble piece such as spell No. 7.

The technique in the context of spell No. 7 necessitated a cast who trusted one another and knew their self-worth. In particular, McClintock’s breathing and articulation exercises were not just connected to projecting one’s voice on stage, but rather fostering self-confidence and finding one’s voice: “The one exercise the La-ta-da-da. It was part of his technique to loosen up the articulators and to breathe. It’s getting in touch with who you are. And believing in that character and that you are that character.”\textsuperscript{382} Edwards teaches breathing and articulation from McClintock’s pedagogy, which she attests the kids always remember the Common Sense Technique.

\textsuperscript{381} Bolanyle Edwards, interview.
\textsuperscript{382} Ibid.
The actors who worked with McClintock on past productions and in the classroom were advanced in the technique and cast in spell no.7. For a Black actor on stage to play a role strikingly similar to their own lives would require, in McClintock’s estimation, the guidance and technique to be able to be free on stage, and trust the ensemble to riff within shange’s story. “A lot of the characters that were in spell no.7 were us. He cast us. He felt I was Maxine… The characters we played are who we were in real life. The characters did things that we did. They hung out at the bar. There was a bar across the street form us called the Lucky Spot on 127th street and that’s were we all hung out. That play was who we were and I think that’s why he chose it.”383

Through the technique, the production reflected familiar characters to the audience, and in turn the performance promoted self-acceptance and self-healing as well as community building. Jerome Preston Bates played ross [sic] and based the character on his own devotion and love of Jimmy Hendrix. Salaam described his performance as “heaving the breadth of life into the play.”384 Bates notes that ross can be interpreted in a myriad of ways: “You could take it to a folk place, you could take it to a blues place, or you can take it to a rock and blues place. I was a Jimmy Hendrix madman, so I took it to that space.”385 The other cast members included Shola Gabby Olaye as the magician, Pat Matthew as lily, Robin Thorne as dahlia, Bruce Jenkins as alec, and Ed Sewer as lou. The level of trust and sophistication of the ensemble work in spell no.7 communicated to the

383 Ibid.  
385 Bates recalls that if anything it seems his degree in college was “the personality of Jimmy Hendrix. Bates, interview.
audience the actors self-acceptance, and McClintock’s healing temple so much so that Salaam’s headline, “Antidote for abuse of Black image” reflected the effect the play had on audiences in the Harlem community.

**From the Mississippi Delta**

*From The Mississippi Delta* produced by McClintock in 1998 at the Barksdale Theatre in Richmond, is an autobiographical play by Dr. Endesha Ida Mae Holland whose childhood story begins in the Deep South. The play presents an alternative Black female perspective from spell no.7’s exploration of urban artists in Harlem. *From the Mississippi Delta* is steeped in the rural environment of a depressed socioeconomic class. By virtue of two examples of female-voiced plays within McClintock’s selection, he considered the variety of perspectives. Essentially, there is not a monolithic Black female perspective, just as there is not one Black aesthetic. Although they are different points of view, there is something that ties all the work together in McClintock’s Queer Black Power Aesthetic. *From the Mississippi Delta* recounts Dr. Holland’s story where she attributed her transformation from prostitute to a PhD scholar to community support. Additionally, the ensemble nature of the play matches McClintock’s philosophy. Beyond the stage, McClintock’s production educated the Richmond community and encouraged the younger generation in a challenging racially divided city. Furthermore, the circular nature of the play harkens to the Afrocentric model of storytelling, which McClintock integrated in the staging.\(^{386}\)

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\(^{386}\) Monica White Ndounou. “Early African American Theatre” (lecture, Tufts University, Medford, MA, September 13, 2012).
The Barksdale Theatre produced From the Mississippi Delta six years after it premiered at Circle in the Square in Manhattan, produced by Oprah Winfrey. Although both productions were situated in the context of the 1990s, the productions took place in two divergent communities: One rural and one urban. The play can impact audiences in varying locations, but the consideration of the protagonist born in the south, then brutally raped by a White man, and yet spiritually transformed during her time in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, particularly resonates with the Richmond population. The story embodies self-determination in terms of Dr. Holland’s act of writing her story into the American narrative. But her inner strength came from a revelatory connection to her community and subsequently African ancestry.

The Jazz Acting Technique applied to From the Mississippi Delta allowed the actors to stay rooted in Dr. Holland’s autobiographical story, yet from night to night find spontaneity in the riffs. Joan Green, part of the all female ensemble, asserts, “Ernie’s contribution helped his actors to portray real people, portray our people as we are. It’s something we have to learn.” She further specifies that in performance, the audience experiences how African Americans move in their daily lives in jazz, in rhythm, in music, through the technique. McClintock articulated in a 1998 interview that the Jazz Acting Technique applied to From The Mississippi Delta: “[The actors] know the song and the music, but they hear things from other musicians [or actors] that impact how the piece is expressed.

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387 Joan Green, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, May 30, 2015.
There’s an openness inherent in it.”\textsuperscript{388} The openness built on trust among the ensemble struck Stage Manager Donna Pendarvis, who in the first few days of rehearsal kept a promptbook, exhaustively writing and erasing staging: “But then it dawned on me, this was going to change every single time until they found it which could be the day before or the night of the show.”\textsuperscript{389} Pendarvis realized that the riffs in performance were not a problem from a Stage Manager’s perspective because “of the process and how it evolves as an ensemble.”\textsuperscript{390}

The context of the New York production at Circle in the Square differs in terms of the rural versus urban constituency, but the more complex difference lies in each city’s respective relationship to slavery, by even mere proximity to still-standing plantations and active White supremacist factions. In a review of the New York production by Frank Rich, he mentions in the same week the controversial Louisiana governor’s race in which a former Ku Klux Klan member came dangerously close to winning a political appointment.\textsuperscript{391} Furthermore, in the early 1990s, the United States witnessed the beating of Rodney King and the riots in Los Angeles in 1992. In 1998, the same year of McClintock’s production, James Byrd Jr., a Black man in Texas, was brutally dragged to death by three White men, evidencing lynching practices had persisted in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. In light of these horrific events, although \textit{From The Mississippi Delta} is a single story from Dr. Holland, the message is ultimately one of community,

\textsuperscript{389} Donna Pendarvis, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 9, 2015.
\textsuperscript{390} Pendarvis describes working with McClintock as an eye-opening experience that changed her whole theatrical experience. Ibid.
perseverance, and the spiritual tenacity of a people. The play works to provide audiences an alternative perspective, and provides hope for younger generations amidst the racial injustices in their contemporary society.

McClintock’s staging of Dr. Holland’s play nods to the immediate community that “raised” the playwright, and also the ancestors in the African Continuum. In an article problematically entitled “Ex-Hooker Dream of New Life” written by Tim Hughes, Dr. Holland is quoted, summing up the message she wants to offer the audiences: “I am not a self-made person. I am community made.” She urges those around her to not just look at her story of her own resolve, but also her shift in a purpose filled life, which resulted from community support. In the script, community is reflected in the character breakdown: Woman 1, Woman 2, and Woman 3, who all begin the play singing one by one “Trouble in Mind.” The play starts in Mississippi and each actor speaks in the first person as Dr. Holland. The actors play all the characters- Black and White, male and female, old and young. Frank Rich asserted that the story had “chaotic waning passages” that were “redeemed” by eloquence. The play falls sharply outside the western Aristotelian structure in which critics, such as Rich, assessment of “good” theatre comes from White western storytelling. Therefore Dr. Holland’s play in the Black Aesthetic tradition disrupts the White aesthetic in content and form.

McClintock built upon the community aspect of the play in the powerful ending that lives in the memory of audience, notably absent from reviews. The

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circular structure of the play is notable in the ending where the three women in union say “I remain- awaiting the call to sisterhood, Dr. Endesha Ida Mae Holland,” and then revive the song “Trouble My Mind.” In McClintock’s production, the women exited the stage and then reentered placing shoes, one by one, in the middle of the stage. The powerful conclusion to the play is not in the scripted text. By the end of the song, shoes filled center stage signifying all those who had contributed to Dr. Holland’s life, and also those nameless faceless Black men and women dating back to the voyage through the Middle Passage.

Although critic Roy Proctor applauded the play in many respects, he remains in his western purview when he suggests the play “would work better at Barksdale if McClintock provided more quiet interludes to puncture and articulate the fevered pace of the production. But one might argue equally that restraining these total-immersion actresses would somehow diminish the play’s vital folkloric juices”\(^{393}\)

Additionally, S. Edwards Stuart’s glowing review described the production as “an unforgettable experience,” yet the journalist notes how the chronological play skirts logic. All of the reviews in the archives neglect the symbolic conclusion of the play, which punctuated Dr. Holland’s journey and McClintock’s Queer Black Power Aesthetic, highlighting self-determination and community building.

McClintock drew from his own aesthetic in terms of educating the community in preparation for the premiere through focusing on outreach programs, revealed in the Library of Virginia archives. Index cards and notes mapping out “Educational Outreach: Cultural Diversity Initiative” during *From

the Mississippi Delta’s pre-production, noted that Ernie McClintock would spearhead this initiative. The documents further explains that due to Barksdale’s interest in servicing the entire constituency of Richmond, the theatre needed to focus their resources on developing diverse audiences, as well as recruiting young actors. Another example about how this philosophy infused the Barksdale Theatre is in a letter from Melinda Skinner, a new Board member of the theatre in 1997. She corresponded with local newspapers and businesses urging these local organizations to advertise and support the production, in order to kick-start the initiative. She mentions that she is inspired by the Barksdale’s commitment to education, and her role is to “expand community support of their creative and educational efforts—in a city that does not always embrace innovation.” Similar to the days of the Black Panthers, community outreach and education for youth are fundamentals in the Black Power philosophy.

Equus

The 127th Street Repertory Ensemble’s production of Peter Schaffer’s Equus was an unlikely choice as far as the call to destroy western storytelling, but in the jazz tradition, McClintock revised this White European story in the context of Black queer sexuality. In 1982, there was a paucity of plays exploring Black queer sexuality from a gay perspective. Due to the lack of material in this genre, McClintock appropriated Schaffer’s successful Broadway hit and transformed the play through Jazz Acting. As Marc Primus remarked, “By the time Ernie got to

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Equus the story changed.” McClintock’s Equus became a story about Black repressed sexuality, and in certain moments visually showed audiences the beauty of male queer sexuality. The production executed this vision through Black actors accessing a collective memory, and creating characters from their individual self-expression. McClintock conducted and staged the production embodying the musicality of a jazz ensemble orchestra.

Regarding Black queer sexuality, early 1980s Black communities avoided the taboo subject, and McClintock rarely accommodated a strategy of avoidance. Furthermore, conservative African American communities associated the AIDS epidemic with White homosexuality, in an effort to distance themselves from the so-called “gay disease.” The association with Black homosexuality and AIDS drastically changed in the next decade. Same-sex relationships were rarely discussed in Black homes, especially in families with a Christian foundation. Marc Anthony Neal asserts that “homosexuality in some communities mirrored a don’t ask don’t tell policy.” Ernie McClintock’s refusal to abide by such a policy made him the subject of rumors. McClintock was rumored as a sexual deviant who required orgies for admittance into his company, which could not be further from the truth. His students are protective of their patriarch and a researcher must work to gain the trust of the Jazz Actors Family. Levy Lee Simon recently published an article where he asserted: “I have to mention that in all the years I knew Ernie he never disrespected me or anyone else I know with

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395 Primus, interview.
397 Ibid., 158.
any sexual aggression or anything like that. Never. The rumors were false to my knowledge. So if anyone even began to mention something like that I’d shut them down with a quickness."\textsuperscript{398} Through Schaffer’s story, McClintock folded in the Black queer perspective that Marc Primus explains escaped some of the audience members due to their shortsightedness.

Nonetheless, the production hailed by both White and Black critics, became a “must see” production for theatre patrons to make the pilgrimage to Harlem and witness a young Black teenager as Alan Strang, played by Gregory Wallace, and the ensemble horses, played by six nearly naked Black men, reinterpret the British classic. The production won five AUDELCO awards and which the leading actor, Gregory Wallace shared Best Actor with a young Denzel Washington. Washington won for his portrayal as Malcolm X in \textit{When the Chickens Come Home to Roost}. Having two recipients of the coveted award is unusual as best. Wallace attributes his success today as director of the MFA program at UC San Diego, to McClintock’s mentorship. His career started with \textit{Equus}, which propelled the young actor into the New York theatre scene.

\textsuperscript{398} Simon, interview.
Regarding the character development in *Equus*, McClintock gave ample space for the actors to discover their own melody within the foundation of the script and crafted an ensemble in the jazz tradition. Gregory Wallace explained that McClintock tapped into something quite personal but allowed him the space to make his own discoveries. Wallace said, “He recognized a process going and he should leave me alone. He would whisper in my ear. I realized the role was someone who was off-center. Someone who had an offbeat way of looking at the world and not understanding. I knew what that was- I am off center- that’s how we connected.”

A Black adolescent in the throws of a fundamentalist religious household discovering his sexuality with six muscular, barely clothed, dark skinned Black men created an image that titillated many and frightened others. These strong reactions to the production illuminates given assumptions about Black male aggression and the skewed assumptions about gay sexuality in the

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399 Wallace, interview.
1980s context. As Cornel West explains “White fear of Black sexuality is a basic ingredient of White racism.” I argue that part of the awe associated with the production is attributed to the absence of a Black Buck stereotype, and instead reflected a tragic story of repression with moments of reverence for the Black body.

The discovery process between Jerome Preston Bates who played Nugget, Alan’s favorite horse, and Wallace took weeks of experimentation that both actors reflected on as “luxurious.” Bates won two AUDELCOs for _Equus_, Best Choreography and Best Supporting Actor, in which he never uttered a single word. Bates differed from Wallace’s approach in that McClintock insisted on a physical creation of Nugget through Jazz Acting’s observations. Bates and the five horsemen spent weeks in Central Park observing horses, to create authentic, majestic characters. They even slept in the stable. To this day, Bates can still embody the horse’s neigh when interviewed in a Brooklyn coffee shop. The actor’s immediate recall demonstrates the effectiveness of McClintock’s technique thirty years later.

The moment that embodied the Queer perspective of unadulterated freedom of the self occurred between Wallace and Bates. An important departure from the Broadway version is the horses’ simple costume and absence of a mask. In most productions, the horses wear large symbolic horse’s masks and create character much like a puppeteer. For Bates, the embodiment of the horses created solely by gaze, neighs, and particular physicality astounded audiences. They focused on the upright nature of the horse, the gait, the sounds with their arms
locked behind their backs. When Alan mounts Nugget in the sexual climax of the play, Wallace climbed onto his shoulders with legs hanging, whipping the Black horse. According to Bates, this moment gave Alan Strang the confidence and the escape from his suppressed self. Wallace’s account of this moment: “The wildest thing about it was six Black men in leather, and incredible and unabashedly sexual and sensual, and being with me completely … touching and embracing and sensing Jerome. The show clicked—everyone’s jaw dropped.” The weeks of rehearsal, experimentation, and physicality culminated into a production that I argue was even more complex than the Broadway premiere. It was a story of Black male sexuality, and the horses were true stallions.400

The staging of the production is most reflective of McClintock’s theoretical grounding in Jazz Aesthetics and harkens to William J. Harris’s theory, which states that Jazz Aesthetics is a procedure converting White poetic and social ideas into Black ones. Beyond the selection of the play, the directorial style incorporated the notion of jazz into the production value and acting style, and most importantly process. An essential component of jazz is the process of creation, not the finished result. McClintock’s actors recall that rehearsals and experimentation with the work never stopped, even in production. In fact the day the actors rehearsed in the theatre, one week prior to performance, he blasted a jazz album in the space to create a sexually charged environment. Wallace said “Jazz: I love that. It was so much about the musicality. In the way that he approached work and language and staging. I can tell you— the way he

400 Primus, interview.
encouraged me was deeply sensorial .” Therefore, although each actor is deeply
grounded in the sensorial, the physical creation of character, there is
simultaneously an emphasis on the ensemble, manifested in the staging of *Equus.*
McClintock’s staging of *Equus* reinforced the idea of ensemble by virtue of the
fact that all actors remained on stage, sitting on the edge of the stage for the
duration of the performance, and in plain sight of the audience.

In America’s patriarchal culture, at varying points in child development,
there is a realization of racial stereotypes, gender inequality, and homophobia,
which is a critical time of identity formation.\(^{401}\) In particular, Du Bois begins *The
Souls of Black Folk,* chronicling his own experience: “Then it dawned upon me
with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in
heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil.”\(^ {402}\) In
McClintock’s *Equus,* Alan Strang struggles with his own identity as a Black queer
teenager in a Christian home. The very presence of six muscular glistening Black
men with an African godlike presence paired with erotic homosexual overtones
celebrates the beauty of Black queer identity. In the context of Alan Strang’s
identity crisis and sexual repression, McClintock challenged society’s standards
and assumptions about Black Masculinity, and revealed an alternative
perspective.

\(^{401}\) For an extensive study in the development of identity and self-awareness in early childhood
development refer to Jacquelynne S. Eccels research. Jacquelynne S. Eccels, “The Development
Before It Hits Home

A palpable shift occurred by the time The Jazz Actors Theatre produced Cheryl L. West’s *Before It Hits Home* (1993) with regards to views of Black gay men in society. Essentially, the categorization shifted the queer Black identity from twice marginalized to thrice marginalized, due to the association with AIDS: “… ‘queer’ Black bodies were no longer simply to be tolerated, excused, and humored, but were now going to be culturally and politically quarantined as diseased Black bodies.”403 This dichotomy further emphasized the association that Malcolm X explains in his biography where Whiteness is associated with purity and blackness is associated with evil.404 As far as *Equus*, all those interviewed and had seen the production discussed the beauty of the Black male bodies on the stage. However, by the time McClintock produced *Before It Hits Home*, many other connotations were associated with Black queerness. Through this production in this particular cultural moment, McClintock produced a show that discussed the taboo subject, which takes a bold self-determined individual to bring to a public forum. The production queried notions of Black Masculinity and queerness, all using the Jazz Acting to rupture the heteronormative assumptions about AIDS and homosexuality, much like the Black Arts plays ruptured assumptions about Black stereotypes. Despite the controversial subject, audiences in New York, Richmond, and Winston-Salem praised the production.

Regarding community, McClintock spoke to local and national communities and also brought together the older Afro-American Studio generation and the younger Jazz Actors generation to forge a familial relationship, which echoes the notion of carrying on the legacy of African ancestry.

Ernie McClintock directed *Before It Hits Home* (1989) in Richmond in 1996, New York and Winston-Salem, which catapulted the director to national notoriety. The National Black Theatre Festival awarded McClintock the Living Legend Award in 1997 for his influence as an actor, director, and educator and contribution to Black Theatre.\(^{405}\) Among the other recipients of the award were Douglas Turner Ward, playwright and founder of the Negro Ensemble Company during the Black Arts Movement. Amiri Baraka and August Wilson also attended the festival and participated in seminars, which represents a unity of artists from varying aesthetics and an effort to unite the Black Theatre community by bringing together older and younger generations. Artists collaborated in readings, workshops, and seminars under the theme “The Black Family on Stage.”\(^{406}\) It is unclear whether or not McClintock chose the play for the festival or simply had it in repertory, but the productions explored relevant subjects affecting Black communities and families.

*Before It Hits Home* left lasting impressions on the audience and actors through illuminating issues avoided by many Black communities: Sexuality, AIDS, and the implications of Black masculinity. The play follows the story of

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Wendal Bailey, a jazz musician, who struggles with his sexuality in the context of a Christian household where he is unfaithful to his pregnant fiancé, Simone. Douglas, his lover, infected with AIDS passes the virus to Wendal and the musician’s health quickly deteriorates throughout the course of the play. He is also the father of Dwayne, a teenaged boy, who lives with Wendal’s strict Christian parents, Reba and Bailey, because he is constantly on the road touring with his band. Throughout the play, Wendal’s body marches towards death and his mother takes her grandson and moves. The father, Bailey, defies society’s call to shun his son and in the final moments of his life demonstrates compassion and love for his dying son. The play’s intensity and engagement with questions of sexuality, AIDS, and inquiry of Black Masculinity shook audiences and critics to the core due to the bold story, but even more so in the live performance by the Jazz Actors calling for self-determination and community, reflective of the Queer Black Power Aesthetic.

One aspect of the narrative deals with Wendal’s inability to live an authentic life as a gay Black man, with the added pressure of the Christian church posing as an institution of oppression to deter self-determination. From the interviews and impressions in archival work, McClintock’s outspoken and unapologetic attitude suggests he found ways to cope with societal pressures and created a loving community around him and his partner, Ronald Walker. However, the discrimination and hate crimes against gay men in the 1980s and 1990s were part of daily life, whether or not they were documented. Lola Loui, who played Maybelle, the neighbor in Before it Hits Home, recalls not knowing
many gay directors in McClintock’s era. She said she never saw him hide in the
shadows, he was independent and self-determined, and “he did not conform or
compromise.”**407 Conversely, within the Christian sect of the Black community,
churches are complicated entities that serve communities, but are known to
subscribe to a policy of silence: “Typically, the stance taken by the Black church
is one of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell.’ In other words, gays and lesbians may actively
participate n the church as long as they are silent about their homosexuality …
[which] also perpetuates the most oppressive and repressive aspects of
fundamentalist Christianity.”**408 McClintock’s lack of compromise and bold
persona lends itself to producing West’s controversial play. His self-determined
and uncompromised spirit, born from the Black Power Movement, shaped his
uncompromising attitude and provided a platform for marginalized individuals to
tell their stories.

In performance, the prejudice nature of Christian fundamentalism that
prevented Wendal from living his truth reveals itself in an exchange between
Wendal, played by Thaddeus Daniels, and Reba, played by Joan Green. Reba
exposes her prejudice and disgust of her son’s sexuality and explodes:

My son! And I took such pride … but last night you made me realize I
hadn’t made nothing, not a damn thing … been walking around fooling
myself … It’s hard to look at something … I mean I look around here and
it’s like somebody came in and smeared shit all over my walls … I’m
scared to touch anything … I can’t stay here and watch it fester, crumble
down around me … right now I can’t help you … I can’t hardly stand to
even look at you … 409

*407* Loui, interview.
In Reba’s mind, Wendal’s diseased body has contaminated the house to the point where she cannot face him or his queer identity.

In the Jazz Actors version of 1997 at the National Black Theatre, Daniels recalls Joan Green’s performance as the quintessential manifestation of Jazz Acting. When she entered the scene, she carried a bottle of holy water, a prop that they had never integrated in rehearsals or previous performances. In Christianity, priests sanctify water for the purpose of blessing people, places, and objects or as a means of casting out evil. In Daniels’s performance, when Wendal confessed he contracted AIDS and Reba shames him, Daniels “…snatched it form her and slathered it over [his] face.”

In the scene, Wendal pleads with his mother to understand, and her unabashed vitriol works to emasculate Wendal and his quest for self-determination. For Daniels, smearing the holy water on his face was an attempt to defy his mother and the homophobic fundamentalist Christian Church. Not even holy water could “cure” him of his homosexuality.

In terms of the Black Power lens, the issue with Black Masculinity conflicts with a man being a self-determined individual, but through McClintock’s aesthetic, the production ruptures the traditional definition of Black Masculinity via the father’s acceptance of Wendal’s humanity. The patriarchy associates masculinity with heterosexuality and machismo. But in an analysis of Marlon Riggs influential documentary, E. Patrick Johnson argues that masculinity is not more of a signifier of Blackness than femininity, and heterosexuality is no

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410 Daniels, interview.
black than gayness. As a result, “Some people view black homosexuality as the final break in masculinity and don’t see the love, don’t see the empowerment, don’t see the caring, the sharing, don’t see the contributions.” However, Before it Hits Home concludes with a father demonstrating passion for his son, despite the Christian doctrine and pressures of Black masculinity. Bailey breaks down into tears, an action associated with femininity, and comforts his son as he passes.

The Jazz Acting Technique applied to West’s play culminated in a powerful theatrical experience so much so that in August 1996, McClintock brought the cast to New York, where the play was offered as an official event of “Harlem Week ’96.” Within the context of the AIDS epidemic, Black masculinity, and the context of Harlem in the 1990s, the audacious statement by McClintock and the Jazz Actors Theatre cannot be overstated. In Abiola Sinclair’s review of the production at the Victoria Five Theater, his observation of Thaddeus Daniels’ performance reflects the effectiveness of McClintock’s First Word technique: “Wendal’s entrance into this situation is strained, largely because he strains it himself. And the stress of putting on a glad face when he’s not feeling well adds to the tension.” Whether the reviewer is speaking of the actual first entrance of Daniels, the reviewer highlights the fact that before the actor even opens his mouth to speak in a scene, there is a flash of past, a whole history represented by the actor coursing through the actor’s body and communicated to the audience. Daniels asserts that the Frist Word provides this

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411 Marlon Riggs documented his own battle with AIDS. The film follows him as his body deteriorates. Johnson, Appropriating Blackness, 37.
412 Ibid.
413 Abiola Sinclair, review of Before It Hits Home.
414 Ibid.
detailed information to the audience, but also connects the actor to the audience, before the actor moves forward with the scene.

The close-knit ensemble family dynamic established by the rigorous technique allows the actor in performance to access theatricality and imagination. According to Dr. Indira Etwaroo who played the Nurse at the 1997 Black Theatre Festival recalls, the process for all productions, and the rehearsal process never began with a table read, a typical practice in the mainstream theatre. Table reads are in the initial rehearsals where the cast, director, and design team read through the play seated at a table and in my experience, all present keep their heads down and in the script. I suspect that McClintock would view table reads as “boring,” and beyond the boredom, actors beginning seated without physical embodiment is not the effective way to create electricity on stage. Rather, the technique supports risk taking on stage due to the discipline and trust established by the actors.

Actor Lola Loui applied Jazz Acting’s “Secrets” in the performance of Maybelle, and attributes her choice to have a “Secret” to McClintock’s ability to encourage actors to make bold, imaginative, yet grounded choices. Her bold choice centered on the friendship between Maybelle and Reba (played by Joan Green), in which “I brought an edginess to the scene, so I brought a tone of lesbianism to the relationship …. You can have a best friend and have a crush and nothing happens, but I only brought it to life in a scene.” The technique therefore invites the actors to access their imaginations and consider the possibilities between characters. She based this on the character’s history in

415 Loui, interview.
terms of her relationship with her Reba. In this respect, the technique requires all the actors, whether they were on stage for the duration of the play or a couple of scenes, like Loui, to create fully realized characters because each actor is of equal importance in the ensemble.

At the Black National Theatre Festival, the reactions from the audience were overwhelmingly full of accolades and compassion. Daniels recalls Marla Gibbs, Emmy award-winning actress from *The Jeffersons*, approached the actor after the show, and hugged him while saying “Oh baby, we just cried and cried, it’s the best thing we’ve seen.” Daniels emphasized that the praise from the audience stuck with the cast not because of self-affirmation, but because the success honored their father and mentor.

The community aspect of the Queer Black Power Aesthetic relates to the family community of the play and the larger Black theatre community, but more importantly in the Jazz Actors Theatre, the collaboration, and connection between the older Afro-American Studio generation and the Jazz Actors Theatre generation. Over the course of McClintock’s twelve-year residence in Richmond, he brought alumni of the Afro-American Studio and 127th Street Repertory Ensemble to continue the lineage of his theatre and provide mentorships to the young actors. McClintock created a genuine family to the degree that the actors today insist they must have known each other in another lifetime.

Since the days of the Afro-American Studio, McClintock’s insistence on laborious hours of rehearsal resulted in a genuine community in that the actors

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416 Daniels, interview.
417 Ibid.
ended up basically living together, eating together, and talking for hours even beyond rehearsal time. Daniels recalls, “We would always be together and it was more than just rehearsal and everyone goes home. He forced us to become an ensemble even though we came to him at difference points, we each felt a throughline because of Ernie.”418 McClintock insisted that Thaddeus Daniels and Zaria Griffin, son and father in the play, traveled by train to North Carolina. At the end of the play, Wendal utters in his last breath, “I’m riding Dad. I’m on the train. I see you … Junior … Mama. Simone (Gasping for breath) She’s pregnant. Oh my God no … I’m so sorry Simone … I’m sorry.”419 Daniels connected with this moment in terms of the character but also in terms of the bond he formed with Zaria Griffin.

**Conclusion**

My proposed theoretical lens, the Queer Black Power Aesthetic, resulted from exhaustive research in literature, productions, interviews, and established theories. The theoretical framework that encapsulates McClintock’s contribution to the American Theatre and acting theory is the direct result of his lived experience and connection to the greater Black community. His practical approach to the theatre emerged from the sociopolitical context of the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s into the 21st century. His descendants of the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech, and Jazz Actors Theatre practice and teach his technique across the country. Common Sense Acting, born in the 1960s,

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418 Daniels, interview.
419 West, 68.
evolved into the Jazz Acting Technique in productions and manifests the Queer Black Power Aesthetic, committed education, and unifying the community, while simultaneously honoring and including womanist and queer perspectives.

Through the Queer Black Power Aesthetic framework McClintock established OJT training and perhaps more than rupturing the White aesthetic, created space for self-expression in both scripted and devised work.
CHAPTER FOUR

Canonizing Enslaved Africans and Street Folk: The Contemporary Black Classics in Training and Performance

As a pioneer of the Black Arts Movement, Ernie McClintock’s Queer Black Power Aesthetic, ever-evolving Jazz Acting Technique, and revivals of Afrocentric plays evidences the success of a movement in that the productions disrupt the distortions of American History. In theory and practice, he worked to establish the “contemporary Black Classics,” which I contend promoted the Queer Black Power Aesthetic, fully realized via the Jazz Acting Technique. In 1978, he defined the contemporary Black Classics as “… plays written by Black writers with a pre-dominance of Black characters that contain elements of significant concern to a large number of Blacks. They also have a high standard of literary excellence (as defined by Blacks) and deal with subject matter of historical consequences that their absence would leave a substantial gap in Black history.”

Based on my analysis of the plays, performances, and engagement with Black theatre scholars, I assert that the criteria for “high standards of literary excellence” according to McClintock include a reciprocal relationship between the written text and the oral tradition, the musicality and rhythm of speech that is distinct to the constituency the play is representing, and finally, asserting a narrative that either gives voice to a silenced community, and/or revises the western narrative of a person or experience. McClintock cites N. R. Davidson’s *El Hajj Malik* (1969) as an example and how “some of our more

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known theatre persons” question why he constantly produces older plays such as Davidson’s play about the slain leader, Malcolm X. He argues that respected Black writers need to be recurrently exposed to Black audiences just as Shakespeare and Moliere are revived in mainstream venues. The goal is to stimulate debates, reviews, discussions, and critiques of these works, to establish criteria to “evaluate” the Black Aesthetic.\textsuperscript{422} The act of stimulating dialogue and debate within Black communities reflects the Queer Black Power Aesthetics’ inclusivity of the diversity of Black artists and theorists.

McClintock’s establishment of the contemporary Black Classics is a critical intervention into American history because of the absence of Black History in American History and Theatre History. From a dramatic literature perspective, the Black Classics are not included in the larger canon of “Classics” in educational institutions. They are a tradition separate from the classical linear structures based in the Aristotelian premise, most commonly associated with the frequently produced plays from William Shakespeare and Arthur Miller.

The contemporary Black Classics historiographically address the absence of Black perspectives as part of American History, and the damaging consequences of attempted erasures of African American communities. In contemporary historical scholarship, John Ernst, Jonathan Zimmerman, and Joseph Moreau examine the issues of a distorted history attributed to the economic interests in early publications claiming to put forth an objective record of America. For example, as far as Antebellum America, in Schoolbook Nation

\textsuperscript{422} Ibid.
(2008), Moreau disproves the myth of objectivity by exposing cultural homogeneity and political nationalism beginning in print in the 1840s.423 This manifested in publishers in the north seeking a profit to remove the controversial material painting the south as benign in the struggle for the emancipation of slaves. Publishers wanted to appeal to a demographic that would support their books and yield profit. This capitalist mentality controlled the interpretation of the past, which resulted in omitting the historical truth that the capitalist system built thriving economies on the backs of slaves.424 Therefore, when McClintock states that the absence of Black Classics would leave a substantial gap in Black history, he is not speaking in hyperbole in that the United States’ capitalist ideology is deeply rooted in profit, which causes an erasure of African American History. I argue, based on archival research and primary sources, that the contemporary Black Classics are particularly reflective of the 1960s/1970s Black Power Movement’s notion of self-determination, resistance to the hegemony, and African Americans’ collective and historical memory. Furthermore, the contemporary Black Classics lives in perpetuity in that it addresses issues still relevant to contemporary audiences, as evidenced by the Black Lives Matter’s initiative to combat discriminatory practices rooted in White privilege.425

425 Coined by activist Peggy McIntosh in 1987, White Privilege is described as “an invisible weightless knapsack of assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks” for the benefit of white heterosexual men and the detriment of women and people of color. For more reading, refer to McIntosh’s White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, Center for Research on Women, 1988).
Due to the White hegemony’s stronghold on history, McClintock’s Afrocentric approach required a separatist company and acting school absent of the White gaze. This separatist strategy was commonly debated among companies during the 1960s and 1970s, and in previous Black Theatres from the Harlem Renaissance. McClintock’s alignment with separatism echoes Franz Fanon philosophy in that “as long as the Black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others.”

Other companies during the Black Arts Movement that align with separatism include the National Black Theatre, New Lafayette Theatre, and the Negro Ensemble Company. Conversely, Woody King Jr.’s New Federal Theatre took another approach, not necessarily pandering to a White gaze, but including other marginalized groups such as Asian Americans and Jewish Americans. Notably, the New Federal Theatre is located in the Lower Eastside, a more integrated population than Harlem. McClintock’s argument for a separatist theatre extended beyond location and Black playwrights, but was rooted in acting theory to create an environment for Black actors to self heal, and access their own artistic expression, supported by their Black peers.

The contemporary Black Classics were part of the holistic repertory season, which included a variety of historical plays, family entertainment and topical plays, and McClintock’s signature Street Theatre productions. McClintock articulated this significance of variety in his first published article on acting in 1974: “Black experience is, indeed, as varied as the works of Ed

Bullins, Alice Childress, William Wellington Mackey, N. R. Davidson, Sonia Sanchez, Ossie Davis, and Ben Caldwell. The structure included historical plays prior to 1958 such as Louis Peterson’s *Take a Giant Step* (1953), Willis Richardson’s *Chip Woman’s Fortune* (1923); non-American written works such as Derek Walcott’s *Shango de Ima* (1969) and Errol John’s *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* (1957); a combination of family entertainment and topical plays “dealing with Blacks, but written by non-Blacks” such as Athol Fugard’s *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* (1972) and Martin Duberman’s *In White America* (1963); and finally one of McClintock’s signature street theatre productions such as *Where It’s At—70* and The Afro-American Studio Poetry Theatre. The versatility of genres from a content perspective and devising theatre from a structural perspective necessitates an ensemble representing a range of hues and complexions, reflecting the diversity of Blackness.

McClintock considered the works of James de Jongh, Roscoe Lee Browne, Richard Wesley, Amiri Baraka, and N. R. Davidson as contemporary Black Classics to educate audiences and actors about the historical odyssey of their ancestors from the vantage point of the 1960s/1970s politically charged America, as well as consider Street Life in the urban cities as an integral part of the greater Black community. I identify Slavery and Street Life as subgenres of the contemporary Black Classics, in which the content of the plays produced in New York and Richmond fall into two seemingly disparate categories, respectively stories of their slave ancestors in ante-bellum and post-ante-bellum America, and

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428 Ibid.
plays that portray Street life of the 1960s and 1970s. Street Life is defined as the urban areas of the United States in which the population is situated at the lowest echelon of the capitalist socioeconomic structure labels. The pejorative labels associated with Black communities in lower income neighborhoods include welfare parasites and junkies, stereotypes that are continually disseminated in the media today.

Although these subgenres can reinforce a monolithic representation of Black life, McClintock emphasized that the revival of the contemporary Black Classics should be established in order to self-reflect and evolve the genre. Within these genres, neither Black female nor Black queer voices are included, and I suspect he knew that the Black Aesthetic as defined in 1978 limited the full diversity of experiences. Although he used the term Black Aesthetic, based on my interviews and his prophetic genius, I contend that he employs that term, albeit monolithic, as a provocative strategy to ignite debate. Similar to jazz, before one graduates to riffing, one must be disciplined and well versed in the codification and canonization within the form. A critical aspect of the form that ties these works together is that they all are ensemble pieces, a cornerstone in McClintock’s acting theory and production value. Within his productions, he trained actors to intentionally avoid repetition of the same performance night after night. This is in sharp contrast to mainstream practices in that the majority of productions on Broadway, for example, require Stage Managers’ meticulous notes detailing the staging, and actors are contractually obligated to the set blocking as

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429 Dr. Indira Etwaroo, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, February 15, 2017.
Conversely, in the advanced OJT model, McClintock could at any moment interrupt a performance if the actors did not fully embody and invest in their work. Regardless of how many times they had performed a given contemporary Black Classic, the commitment to the ensemble dynamic required a constant state of discovery in the jazz tradition.

Both the Slavery and Street Life subgenres authored by Black writers address the immediate concerns of their communities and requires a sophisticated ensemble of actors. In the Slavery subgenre, associated with the journey originating in the West’s colonization and capture of African people, the plays portray the residual effects of the Middle Passage in the contemporary world. The Street plays revived focus on Black experiences of urban communities, which is comprised of a politically advanced, yet economically depressed constituency. Both the White hegemony and even many middle class African Americans often overlook their struggles and diminish their cultural contribution. In summation, I argue that the contemporary Black Classics, in conjunction with the repertory season are an essential part of the African continuum that chronicle lived experiences of overlooked Harlemites from the 1960s/1970s, yet maintains ongoing relevance. In the contemporary moment even considering the efforts of the Black Lives Matter Movement, those in urban communities who fall beneath

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430 Sara Bradley is a Broadway and Off-Broadway Stage Manager in New York. Her recent Broadway projects include *The Importance of being Ernest* (2011), *The Book of Mormon* (2011-2014), and *The Heidi Chronicles* (2015). Her most recent contract is with the Lucille Lortel Theatre where she most recently Stage Managed *Vietgone* (2016). Sara Bradley, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, September 12, 2016.
431 In 1965 after the death of Malcolm X, then LeRoi Jones changed his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka. In all advertisements for the Afro-American Studio, McClintock included the poet’s full name Imamu Amiri Baraka.
the poverty line are still subject to discrimination based on class and geography. For their constituency, perhaps traveling to a protest in Ferguson is not feasible for a myriad of reasons, financial or otherwise. Furthermore, urban residents are rarely interviewed daily by CNN for their insights on health insurance, policy reform, or other insights related to the broader American landscape. But when a discriminatory police officer commits a horrific murder of an unarmed African American or civil unrest ensues, images of individuals in a heightened emotional state saturate the television. The initial neglect followed by the media only reporting acts of violence and/or volatile protests in these communities has resulted in curated photos and sound bites, which result in the perpetuation of stereotypes.

McClintock’s commitment to establishing the contemporary Black Classics shows how he tirelessly put “action behind what he believed” as demonstrated by his revivals of Amiri Baraka, James de Jongh, Richard Wesley, and N. R. Davidson, to serve his actors and community. James de Jongh’s *Do Lord Remember Me* and Baraka’s *Slaveship* are two plays that reflect the Slavery subgenre, while the Street Life subgenre emerged as a result of plays such as Wesley’s *The Mighty Gents* and Davidson’s *El Hajj Malik*. The contemporary Black Classics, *Do Lord Remember Me, Slaveship, The Mighty Gents, and El Hajj Malik*, advanced the Jazz Acting Technique in theory and practice by exposing actors to plays rooted in the Queer Black Power Aesthetic, which in turn

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432 Etwaroo, interview.
establishes a canon of literature critical to disrupting the distorted version of the
dominant history, and mainstream criteria for theatrical excellence.

While there is little definitive archival evidence of McClintock’s criteria
for the Black Classics beyond a 1978 interview with A. Peter Bailey, in my
analysis of productions, revivals, and repertory bills, these works in performance
speak to the African Continuum and the contemporary issues of underrepresented
sects of Black communities. Furthermore, one can detect traces of McClintock’s
intention to create such a canon in the early development of the technique. In his
1974 article “Perspective on Black Acting,” he situates the technique by
introducing two quotes, one from Amiri Baraka and the other from playwright
Ron Milner:

**BARAKA:** The reason we spoke of Black Arts was to get Black artists,
whether they were cooks or poets or tailors or singers or jazz musicians or
athletes or actors, computer technicians or dancers or politicians, to tell
about Black people truthfully, and not only tell them about themselves and
their oppressors like they actually were, but also, hopefully, to provide
some indication of what we, as a people, had to do to free ourselves, to
rebuild our communities and restore our people to their traditional
greatness.

**RON MILNER:** Details! Details should be moving around those stages
in all kinds of images …

The article then begins with McClintock explaining that these quotes serve two
purposes: In terms of Baraka, his quote best describes what McClintock
considers to be the core philosophy of Black Theater, while Milner’s succinct,
straightforward quote emphasizes “detail,” a key term in his technique. The
acknowledgment of the diversity of experiences along with embodied details

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433 McClintock, “Perspective on Black Acting,” 78-79.
crafted by the individual actor reflect the Queer Black Power Aesthetic, and provides the theoretical and practical components related to the contemporary Black Classics.

Placing my primary research including reviews, programs, iconographic representations, advertisements, and interviews in conversation with Franz Fanon, Theodor Adorno, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harvey Young, Abiodun Jeyifous, and Margaret B. Wilkerson, reveals the criteria and necessity of contemporary Black Classics as McClintock’s foundation for his acting technique. Teaching these plays and identifying their relevance in the contemporary moment will broaden the scope of theatre education both in theory and in practice. The revival of these plays across four decades in New York and Richmond, and actors’ first hand account of the contemporary Black Classics introduced by McClintock proves the necessity to reach a wider audience and student population.

The absence of classical African American writers in theatre education privileges classical works by White authors such as Shakespeare, Molière, Chekhov, and the classical Greek playwrights. The assumption of these White playwrights not only represents false fixed notion of literary excellence, but also excluded playwrights who meet high standards and reflect a different tradition that courses through the diaspora. As McClintock suggests, without the contemporary Black Classics, there would be a substantial gap in the continuum regarding the history of slavery, the tenacity of a culture despite oppression, as well as a demographic of contemporary America whose contributions to society are not acknowledged nor considered. The genre supports emblematic voices
from the Black Arts Movement, and echoes W. E. B. Du Bois’ 1926 call for Black Theatre in which he states, “Plays of a real Negro theatre must be … about us, by us, for us and near us.” Furthermore, these two divergent premises for the Black Classics, antebellum Black experiences, and everyday Street life of Black Americans, reveal historical contributions to promote education and ensure the legacy of plays, playwrights, and productions that are critical components of the African Continuum. Through McClintock’s theoretical lens, the absence of these works would result in a lack of understanding of the current moment in the 21st century.

As explored in Chapter Two, McClintock’s versatility and inclusion of Black folks from various parts of the country, genders, sexual orientations, and Caribbean descent demonstrates that he understood and embodied what Harvey Young identifies as Critical Memory. Critical Memory identifies similarities in collective memory but also the nuances in individual experience, and is important for students and audiences to understand because without the recognition of multiple experiences, the single Black experience perpetuates an already limited narrative.

**Slavery Subgenre: Do Lord Remember Me and Slaveship**

The formation of the Slavery Subgenre in contemporary Black Classics can be traced to the training in the early days of the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech in Harlem, and revived in Richmond. This genre connects to Marc Primus’s integration of Nathaniel Huggins’ historical framework taught in

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Black history and culture courses. Huggins asserts: “The triumph of the human spirit over adversity that is the great story of Afro-American slavery [in an] evocative and impressionistic style, which departs from the conventional descriptive and analytical exposition of standard histories.” In literary theory, the impressionistic style focuses on the individual’s perception of events, which are categorized as subjective and emotional rather than objective and intellectual. Hence, they are generally not seen as historical record by the hegemony. Huggins uses the term impressionistic in order to identify that African American’s experiences of American history are viewed as subjective, whereas the White men’s points of view are largely accepted as objective. Huggins research legitimizes African American’s collective memory and experiences in the context of American History. *Do Lord Remember Me* and *Slaveship* provide a similar historical record rooted in Afrocentricity, and in turn honors the painful past while celebrating the survival of their people.

As part of the Slavery subgenre, *Do Lord Remember Me* and *Slaveship* take place in the antebellum south, and through the theatrical medium in an evocative and impressionistic style gives voice to former slaves’ lived experiences. Furthermore, *Do Lord Remember Me* and *Slaveship* reclaim ancestral bodies that have been distorted by traditional history. It is important to note that reclaim as Young defines it, does not suggest erasing the past and scripting a new one. Rather, reclaim means, “… to take something back. It is to possess something in the present while knowing that it only has recently been

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back in your possession … It is to know the past in the present as you work
toward creating a future." Therefore, McClintock’s continual revival of these
productions throughout the four decades demonstrates his efforts to bring their
stories and perspectives to the fore of American History. From their respective
historical moments, Slaveship and Do Lord Remember Me resituate American
history from a Black perspective, and tells the stories of their ancestors, absent of
the White gaze. Without these lived histories, there would be a substantial gap
omitting the histories of those very people who against their will are responsible
for America’s rapid economic growth and cultural capital.

The dehumanization of Black bodies in terms of American history can be
traced to the slave trade, and continues to persist in recent events of police
brutality. These acts of enslavement and violence work to cause an erasure of
African identity and eviscerate Black self-worth. However, the spirit of a people
survived despite the physical and figurative pressures of the hegemony. As Henry
Louis Gates Jr. begins in the first chapter of his prolific book The Signifying
Monkey, “In the Middle Passage, Africans carried with them aspects of their
cultures that were meaningful, that could not be obliterated, and that they chose,
by acts of will, not to forget.” McClintock continued to evoke ancestral bodies
inspired by the text and executed in performance to carry on the tradition and
resilience of his ancestors. Furthermore, the revival of these plays in Harlem and
Richmond, demonstrate the poignancy and relevance for audiences across
multiple generations, and in various historical moments. Do Lord Remember Me

436 Ibid., 135.
and *Slaveship* show the significance of evoking ancestral bodies and ultimately engaging in a Critical Memory, modes significant in the African Continuum. The notions of evoking ancestral bodies in live performance, in varying subgenres, from the slave ships to the streets of urban life requires a sophistication of acting technique outside a White western approach.

As a historical intervention, Ernie McClintock’s productions of James de Jongh’s *Do Lord Remember Me* in New York and Richmond gave agency to former slaves through their own narratives in an effort to reconcile what Harvey Young identifies as critical memory. de Jongh’s *Do Lord Remember Me* connect to critical memory in that the director identified similarities among the characters and acknowledged experiential overlap while not presuming that all Black bodies have the same memories. The playwright’s writing process and adaptation of these slave narratives recorded in the 1930s further engages in Critical Memory. After staged readings and workshop productions over six years of refining the script, the play became an overlap of the narratives in a circular non-western structure. James de Jongh pieces together the disparate stories from enslaved Africans in Virginia, linked through this “peculiar institution.” McClintock’s productions of *Do Lord Remember Me* upset the traditional historical narrative by educating performers and audiences, engaging with Collective and Critical Memory, and subsequently advancing Jazz Acting in the OJT model.

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Although the play’s text is primarily word-for-word documented accounts, de Jongh did not want a representational style akin to a documentary, which echoes McClintock’s insistence on theatricality in lieu of commonly practiced naturalism according to Stanislavsky, which McClintock simply categorized as boring. Boring choices were perhaps the most egregious sin an actor could commit in the theatre, according to McClintock. James de Jongh morphed the narratives to embody theatricality with a particular emphasis on music, which relates to Jazz Acting’s implementation of music and rhythm as foundational to building characters. James de Jongh notes in the stage directions, “Afro-American musical forms are important elements in Do Lord Remember Me, but the play should not be misconstrued to be a musical. The songs should be performed as expressions of the musical legacy of slavery, arising spontaneously from the action of memory and sung, without any formal accompaniment, to hand clapping, foot stomping and improvised harmonies.” Spirituals and work songs are two of the foundational forms that de Jongh refers to as important elements of the play. They originated in the antebellum South, both religious and yet working with coded messages for slave escape routes dealing with multiple levels of promise and catharsis. Scholars such as jazz musician and theorist Barry Long trace the foundations of jazz to spirituals and work songs. According to the Library of Congress, “Spirituals are typically sung in a call and response form, with a leader improvising a line of text and a chorus of singers providing a solid refrain in unison. The vocal style abounded in freeform slides, turns, and rhythms

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441 Ibid.
The distinction that de Jongh makes is that in the play how the music arises spontaneously without formal accompaniment reflects how the work songs in particular would have been punctuated with space for labor— the swinging of the hammer, the chain, and so forth.

McClintock’s implementation of music and rhythm in character development relates to de Jongh’s structure in theory and practice. McClintock describes the integration of music as part of the distinct lived experience of Black actors, reminiscent of spirituals and work songs:

We hear music in our heads constantly. We walk to it, we work by it, we hum it, we sing it. What we sing, hum, hear in our head, pat our feet to, repeat and speak out lyrics from, depends on who we are, what our situation is, and what we want … A Black actor must think about his characters and influence them with their music. Patting feet, snatches of tunes, shaking shoulders while sitting, dancing to get across the room rather than walking, slapping thighs, snapping fingers, clapping hands, instantaneous body vibrations…like when you get the spirit … all are important manifestations of the Black experience.

Musicality in *Do Lord Remember Me* is distinct from the mainstream musical because spiritual and work songs are meant to arise spontaneously, signifying in tandem with the dialogue, and divergent from the traditional White musical form following strict verse and chorus.

The notable music in the production is attributed to the technique’s equal reverence for the collective company and individual artistic expression. For example, the company would hum while actor Sharalyn Bailey sang a solo. The ensemble remained on stage throughout the performance, supporting just like a

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443 McClintock, “Perspective on Black Acting,” 84.
jazz orchestra. The songs were also altered according to the artists themselves. Sharalyn Bailey, Jazz Actor, recalls McClintock telling her to “sing around the tune” as opposed to singing the melody.\footnote{Bailey, interview.} The idea of singing around the tune was McClintock’s way of saying that instead of replicating the melody, the individual should discover her own interpretation. Singing around the tune also relates to the consideration of a character’s speech in that McClintock instructed his students to treat the text in a similar way. Actors should take the time and consideration a singer puts into each note, with each word. For example, what happens when a word is elongated or shortened, and how does that shift the meaning. Ron Fleming echoes Sharalyn’s memories of original music based on the lyrics, and also bringing their own experiences to the rehearsal room, which “… blew [his] mind.”\footnote{Fleming, interview.} He said by the time they finished, they had an extensive list and through this workshop, McClintock unearthed something personal from the individual and the company; all together it brought their collective identity to the fore.\footnote{Ibid.}

In both structure and content, de Jongh’s character “the Slave” represents collective memory that throughout the play evokes the stories of the slave narratives through the struggle to remember. A Stanislavsky-based technique would not serve this impressionistic character, and a Method-trained actor for example, would most likely resist the playwright’s assertion that an actor can embody a spiritual idea. I argue that the struggle to remember is due to Structural
Amnesia.\textsuperscript{447} Structure Amnesia maintains the authority structure of White supremacy in America as evidenced by Jim Crow laws, acquiescence to lynchings, acceptance of “coon songs,” and the exploitation of Blackface minstrelsy.\textsuperscript{448} De Jongh explained that the Slave character came into being in the way that a group of individuals around a fire are telling stories, and out of the flames this character, the “dark-skinned” Slave emerges as the storyteller, a virtual character.

The significance of de Jongh’s description of the hero with dark-skinned complexion is a direct challenge to subvert the dominant White master narrative, which associates dark-skinned complexions with stereotypes regarding Africans as aggressive savages that evolved in America into the stereotyped dark-skinned thug.\textsuperscript{449} An example of a present day account related to colorism from George Yancy states: “My darkness is a signifier of negative values grounded within a racist social and historical matrix that predates my existential emergence. The meaning of my blackness is not intrinsic to my natural pigment, but has become a value-laden ‘given,’ an object presumed untouched and unmediated by various contingent discursive practices, history, time, and context.”\textsuperscript{450} Therefore, within the context of de Jongh’s Slave character, he addresses this experience by creating a dark-skinned man who has been subjected to dehumanization, but throughout the play self heals and asserts self-determination.

\textsuperscript{447} Blight, \textit{History and Memory in African American Culture}, 63.
\textsuperscript{448} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{449} Monica White Ndounou, “Introduction” (lecture, Tufts University, Medford, MA, September 6, 2012).
\textsuperscript{450} Yancy, \textit{Black Bodies, White Gazes} (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 3.
The Slave’s odyssey begins on the auction block, almost completely nude in McClintock’s production, the actor then becomes Nat Turner, and concludes as Albert Jones, a Civil War solider from the northern army, effectively enacting his own liberation. McClintock did not employ nudity often, yet McClintock always made bold choices and expected his actors to the same. The significance of the bare body which was dehumanized as a slave on the block, then criminalized as Nat Turner, and concludes in the hero’s uniform, enacting his liberation, highlights the dark-skinned man portraying strength, pride, and liberation as opposed to the White oppressor’s projection on Turner as a religious fanatic and criminal. The Slave revises and reclaims the distorted image of Turner in the past, by Thomas Gray, and in the present, by William Styron. Once Nat enacts the bloody deeds on stage narrated by the slaves, he is then hung on stage, ultimately transformed into Albert Jones who is “… proudly taking leave of his family to enlist.”

In terms of an actor transitioning from one distinct character to the next in front of the audience, the Jazz Actors learned to transition not from an internal acting method, by way of the ensemble. As per the technique, the actors were in a constant stage of motion humming, performing an activity, and responding physically or vocally, for the purpose of engaging with the ensemble. *Do Lord Remember Me* in Richmond manifested McClintock’s “expectation of collective contributions.” Mary Hodges recalls the transition of her character Martha into

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451 Ibid.
452 de Jongh, *Do Lord Remember Me*, 46-47.
453 Hodges, interview.
another slave character as a collective effort guided by the text and collectively initiated by the ensemble.

In these transformations there is indeed a “being and becoming” linking together tied memories, yet paying homage to the individual’s experiences in their lived moment and addressed in Richmond production. Albert Jones calls out to the different sections of the stage: “Freedom! ... Freedom! ... Freedom! ... Freedom!” He undulates throughout the play between collective memory and critical memory to serve the storyteller function, and assist the others in recalling their past.

An important aspect of Do Lord Remember Me in terms of the development of the technique is the potentially traumatic experience of an actor reenacting the demoralization of African Americans stripped nude on the slave block. As discussed, even when an actor properly uses Method training, explored in Monica White Ndounou’s research, the act of embodying a tortured human life for those who inherited the legacy of slavery would inevitably, at best, be a challenging feat. D.L. Hopkins, who played the Slave, recalls that costuming was always the last thing on everyone’s mind. Before the opening of the play, McClintock told Hopkins that Ronald Walker the “Sweetest man you ever met,” would help with the garment. In Walker’s unassuming tone he said, “Come out of your pants and underwear. It’s like a loincloth. Don’t worry about it. It’s going to be all right. We are gonna tie the knot in such a way that when it’s

455 de Jongh, *Do Lord Remember Me*, 55.
457 Hopkins, interview.
Hopkins humorously tells this story because he admits that young women attended the performances, and he would do some pushups in preparation. Ed Broaddus who played the auctioneer brought him on stage: “Ed brings me out, and my look of scared—I was scared. They bid on me. It wasn’t going the way he wanted. He pulled the string.” The genuine fear for Hopkins in that moment was related to his embarrassment in front of women, and the whirlwind of costuming that Walker and McClintock cleverly integrated.

Although this story may appear anecdotal, it demonstrates a critical moment in the development of Jazz Acting as well as the distinction from western techniques. The technique is not based in heightening emotional trauma, as in the case of Greek tragedy. From a character analysis perspective, actors trained under McClintock’s tutelage were instructed to write their biographies in the third person because “Ernie was keen on keeping it a character.” At the same time, although actors distanced themselves from biographies, in performance, the young actors did not put on age make up or wigs. McClintock demanded, “no make up, he didn’t believe in hiding the visage,” and “what you do in rehearsal you do in performance.” In other words, the rehearsal process did not consist of the typical schedule where productions largely follow a schedule where props, costumes, and set pieces are introduced during tech week.

The core of the anecdote also reveals an important directorial strategy when taking on traumatic and painful material in current conversations of Black

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458 Ibid.
459 Ibid.
460 Hopkins, interview.
461 Ibid.
Acting Theory. In J. W. Robinson Horne’s review, he described the production as hilarious, in which the oral narratives “ran the gamut from tales of slave horror to slave humor.” Through this challenging text, McClintock developed the Jazz Acting Technique in an OJT framework while simultaneously pursuing his commitment to establish the contemporary Black Classics in the context of Richmond.

As a contemporary Black Classic, Do Lord Remember Me advances the Jazz Acting Technique in the OJT context, and embraces in performances a continual discovery of the text in varying venues and audiences. For example, in 1995 the Jazz Actors organized a three-day festival called “Radiant Revelations” at Henderson Middle School where they performed a Repertory Showcase, two devised pieces A Sense of Pride and The Collard Green and Cornbread Divas, billed alongside Do Lord Remember Me. For their younger audience, the nudity was not part of the production value and the goal of this repertory billing was to reach younger generations with a range of work honoring Langston Hughes, Black women writers, and slave narratives, absent from textbooks.

Establishing these works at the middle school, I argue, is an effort to continue the Black Arts Movement’s commitment to community education about African American traditions and diversity of experiences through theatre. In the program, McClintock wrote, “It was desirable to have the actors and audience connect in a personal way as though at a community event. The audience is to be

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462 Monica White Ndounou, Sharon Bridgforth, Omi Osun Jones, Lisa L. Moore, Sharrell D. Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer are scholars who address these issues in their scholarship.

part of the experience, participating in it, involved in it, not simple sitting and observing from a distance.”

For example, the packed venue in a school auditorium, with the faculty sitting in folding chairs and the students cross-legged on the floor, could be a challenge for an actor who is accustomed to a darkened theatre with silent audiences. To grasp their attention, D. L. Hopkins ran through the auditorium, through the clusters of children leaping over seats when the Slave played a runaway. By creating that audience connection, it is a communal event where the oral histories command the audience and educate them on the struggle and perseverance, from the perspective of slaves in their own words.

The Jazz Acting Technique not only prepares actors for diverse audiences, but also thrives on the opportunity to approach a text in new contexts. Hopkins emphasizes that in non-linear storytelling, the discovery process is ever-present: “Once you have an opportunity to approach the same text, you want to improve upon on what you did last as opposed to replicate what came last.”

Other venues at which the Jazz Actors performed these works included college theatres such as James Madison University and Virginia Commonwealth University. The OJT model informed the role of the audience in the Jazz Acting Technique, whereby the spectators were effectively McClintock’s pupils who were educated by the Jazz Actors Theatre’s historical intervention in the capital of the confederacy. McClintock’s pedagogy was not a typical middle school class with textbooks in a classroom, but an embodied performance chronicling the lived

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464 Robinson, “Jazz Actors ‘Do Lord’…laudable.”
465 Hopkins, interview.
466 Ibid.
experiences and memories of former slaves. Through the Jazz Acting Technique and the Black Classics, McClintock set a new bar for theatrical excellence in Richmond, and perhaps even disrupted the distortion of American History in those very textbooks the audiences were using in the classroom.

Whereas *Do Lord Remember Me* is based on recorded interviews, Amiri Baraka’s *Slaveship* is grounded in visceral images, sounds, and smells to assault the White hegemony. As Suavae Mitchell articulates, McClintock remounted many plays from the Black Power ilk including Baraka’s *Dutchman* (1964), *The Toilet* (1964), and *Slaveship* (1967); Ed Bullins’s *The Electronic Nigger* (1949), Paul Carter Harrison’s *Tabernacle* (1969), and Joseph A. Walker’s *The River Niger* (1973). *Slaveship* addresses the journey of enslaved Africans on the Middle Passage, a voyage most Americans disregard its inhumane conditions and the necessity to face America’s shameful past. As a contemporary Black Classic, Baraka’s play is reflective of the Black Power philosophy, yet remains relevant decades after the 1960s because America has still not reconciled the past.

Amiri Baraka’s *Slaveship* confronts America’s denial of reconciliation by prescribing and distributing images, smells, and sounds including drums, screams of the tortured, rocking of the ship, moaning, and sounds of the wind and ocean, in which McClintock’s technique approaches the cultural trauma not through emotional recall, but with a physical and rhythmic method. In the rehearsals, McClintock started with the warm up which included relaxation while seated in a chair, connected to breath, with eyes closed. The actors turned their heads to the left for four counts and then the right for four counts in about half a dozen series.
After the relaxation, the actors kept their eyes closed and he cued them to make the sounds of the wind, then the water. He instructed, “Sound out how you feel.” Then, in rhythmic chanting, the men sounded out “ah” then the women. The recording demonstrates the director’s ability to create a haunting and terrifying mood simply with breathe and sound. It is the introduction to the play itself and the ominous tone that encapsulates Huggins’ description:

Like the thunder following the lightning, a spark of life would pass through them all. But here, in this darkness, rocking, the voice could awaken only the most feeble echo, and nothing would come back on the ears save the hiss and roar of the sea, the whine and whir of the wind, the moans and whimperings of desolation.

McClintock guided his actors, much like a conductor of an orchestra. The rehearsal of sounds concluded with McClintock uttering “Quiet, quiet …” and the ensemble eventually faded out and he instructed, “Breathe.” The director’s delicate approach to intense and raw material provided Black actors a safe way to approach the work rooted in the pain of slavery but also the triumph of the African spirit.

Music was an essential part of honoring the pain and spirit prescribed by Baraka, and executed by McClintock. In all McClintock’s productions, music and dance engaged in dialogue with one another. Ronald Walker, the technical director, crafted the scoring for the productions at a meticulous and measured pace, which frustrated the director’s demanding pace and exacting method. The balance of the two seemingly opposite personality types also provided the actors

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467 Tape Recorded 1/23/75 at the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble, from the Private Collection of Geno Brantley.
468 Huggins, “Black Odyssey,” 52.
469 Tape Recorded 1/23/75 at the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble, from the Private Collection of Geno Brantley.
insight into collaboration between designers, actors, and director during rehearsal. In *Slaveship*, the author specifies that African drums percussive sounds sustain throughout the play. Baraka also specifies the integration of the following songs: “African Sorrow Song,” “Lord, Jesus, Deliver Me,” and “When We Gonna Rise.” These songs and spirituals alongside wails and groans, and the wind and sea, tells the story of slavery from the enslaved perspective. The details of bodily functions, rancid smells, sounds of chains, corpses thrown off the ships, children’s cries and laughter of the White slave owner all capture the dehumanization and aspects of the voyage across the Middle Passage to the first days of slavery.

As a contemporary Black Classic writer, Baraka’s breadth of work is known for assaulting the oppressor, inspired by Black Power in the 1960s and yet remains relevant to the contemporary moment. For example, conservative news anchor Bill O’Reilly admonished former first lady Michelle Obama’s speech at the Democratic National Convention, which revealed her bittersweet inner conflict as a Black woman living in a house built by slaves. On O’Reilly’s program called the “No Spin Zone,” which is viewed by millions of Americans, he criticized Michelle Obama claiming the conditions of the slaves as happy and fortunate as empirical fact: “To keep slaves and free laborers strong, Washington’s administration provided meat, bread, other staples, and decent lodging.” Furthermore, in my own experience I have had discussions with

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470 Etwaroo, interview.
471 “Bill O'Reilly Defends White House Slave Comments,” accessed February 16, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUmCWGPgU7g.
conservative Republicans who claim that Americans “saved” Africans from an uncivilized culture. Although these individuals do not endorse the practice of slavery, they claim that the outcome for Black Americans today is a more civilized existence with boundless opportunities, which are both fallacies.

As discussed in Moreau’s *Schoolbook Nation*, the reason for excluding an accurate history of slavery was an economic one and McClintock’s productions, rarely motivated by financial gain, exposed this injustice. In other words, books avoided the controversial issue of social and economic class within the system. The truth regarding social inequality and economic exploitation clashed with “the national myth of democracy and boundless economic opportunity.”

McClintock and the residents of Harlem were politically advanced and painfully aware of discrimination in various institutions, one being the theatre. Because they ontologically experienced daily racisms, they created a theatre for, by, about, and near them. They knew that in doing so, funding would be limited because rebelling against mainstream hegemonic storytelling necessarily results in the absence of financial gain.

McClintock considered *Slaveship* part of the contemporary Black Classics due to its circular structure in the form of vignettes, tracing his contemporary moment in the 1960s and 1970s to the Middle Passage, a pivotal origin of tracing the African continuum. In relationship to structure, the wails, and moans of the slaves, the shackles, the cries, the wind, the sickness, the songs and rhythms

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persist throughout the play, evoking the past. A fundamental component of the contemporary Black Classic canon featured in *Slaveship* include the stage directions that allow the performer and director to interpret and improvise these vignettes. In relationship to the technique, the melody of the play includes recognizable images such as a Blackface minstrel, and the actors have agency to create their own jazz riff. The shuffling Negro is not necessarily described with strict details related to a stereotyped cartoon. But rather, the actor portrays the Negro through his own interpretation with the potential to assault the hegemony (the audience) and reclaim Blackness:

Lights up on a shuffling “Negro.” Lights off…drums of ancient warriors come up … hero-warriors. Lights blink back on, show shuffling man, hat in his hand, scratching his head. Lights off. Black dancing in the dark … Show Slave, raggedy ass, raggedy hat in hand, shuffling toward the audience shuffling, scratching his head and butt. Shaking his head up and down agreeing with massa, agreeing, and agreeing, while the whips snap.473

Using the term Negro demonstrates the passing of time in which the label was utilized in the 20th century. Baraka further leaves room to comment on whatever historical moment the play is being performed, in his description to shuffle toward and interact with the audience. The character shuffling, projecting a lack of intelligence, performing for the slave master, traces back to the dehumanization derived from the captures in Africa and the suffering on the slave ships. Baraka includes the banging of the African drums to remind the audience that the past is very much a part of our present moment. Furthermore, through horrific oppression and collective memory, the spirit of the African homelands persists.

Slaveship therefore rewrites history in terms of the memory of the Middle Passage and the survival of those from African descent.

In addition to a revision of history, these plays contribute to the African Continuum in that they reclaim their ancestral bodies in an autonomous interpretation with a technique crafted for African Americans. Ernie McClintock’s theatres were a total experience of Black theatre, from the acting technique, to the set design, to the music, to the movement, to the selection of plays. Without these stories that acknowledge and revise history, the same institutional racisms perpetuate and enslave Black bodies in our contemporary context in the form of mass incarceration and police brutality.

Ernie McClintock integrated Do Lord Remember Me and Slaveship as essential works of the Black Theatre, but in a broader sense, contributed to the efforts to reframe the manner in which American slavery is taught and the legacy of African American people is understood in the United States. McClintock is part of a holistic effort in the 1960s of weaving African American History into the fabric of national history. In the 1940s and 1950s, history and social science textbooks focused on the economic progress of America, yet overlooked poverty and class conflict in the United States. Frustrated African Americans in the 1960s in cities like Detroit demanded the inclusion of Black histories in the education system, which led to backlash from White conservatives.

McClintock’s approach, along with other artists in the Black Arts Movement such as Robert Macbeth and Barbara Ann Teer, took an alternative approach of

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475 Moreau, “Schoolbook Nation,” 266.
focusing their efforts on educating their communities, rather than integrating themselves into the already established White theatre. Therefore, although many Black Arts Movement figures were criticized for being separatist, the effort echoes Alain Locke’s refusal to accept Blacks as necessarily secondary against the White hegemony. McClintock’s school included Black history and culture courses to educate his pupils, and also to prepare them for productions authored by de Jongh and Baraka. Through this approach, both the performers and audiences experienced communal and historical narratives neglected by education, a fundamental institution of oppression.476

“Between the Caveman and Civilization”: The Street Life Subgenre

The contemporary Black Classics’ Street Life subgenre may appear to be quite distanced from characters from the antebellum south, but the Slavery subgenre and Street Life subgenre are connected through the ensemble practice in the jazz tradition, which progresses the African Continuum. Furthermore, pairing plays of either subgenre on one billing communicates that the present day struggles of the 1960s and 1970s are inextricably linked to slave origins. The repertory programming furthermore aligns with McClintock’s objectives to promote the contemporary Black Classics. Ed Bullins of the New Lafayette Theatre is a defining figure of Street Plays, and McClintock produced his work as well including Clara’s Ole Man (1969) and Electronic Nigger (1969). However, Richard Wesley and N. R. Davidson were more memorable for the actors

476 Patricia Hill Collins defines institutions of oppression as governmental systems in place that discriminate against people of color.
involved in both companies. McClintock cast and selected plays based on his standards and the demographic of his actors. Nonetheless, the Street Life genre specifically explored those Black folks who are labeled thugs, lazy, welfare queens, uneducated, and uncivilized.\textsuperscript{477}

The works of Bullins, Wesley, and Davidson among others examine what Harvey Young refers to as the Black Habitus, a critical component of the African Continuum. Young draws upon the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of habitus to understand how performance embodies the Black body as both singular and collective.\textsuperscript{478} Bourdieu’s theory unpacks how social expectations are projected on bodies and those bodies then become a model for society and other individuals, to be appropriate members of society. In the mainstream media, Black bodies in the poverty-stricken neighborhoods, project stereotypes continuing this potentially precarious cycle.

As Young explains, although it is painful and dangerous, Black society is never completely trapped by this particular habitus and McClintock’s career and productions of \textit{The Mighty Gents} and \textit{El Hajj Malik} demonstrate liberation from the habitus in performance. The nuances of perspectives and experiences can redefine these social expectations, and can become an entry point to understand multiple perspectives. Additionally there is space for difference through interpretation and the ability to change one’s habitus.\textsuperscript{479} The exploration of these plays collectively educates the audience and the performers to connect with Street

\textsuperscript{477} Bogle, \textit{Toms, Coons, Mulattos, and Bucks}, 10.
\textsuperscript{478} Young, \textit{Embodying Black Experience}, 20.
\textsuperscript{479} Ibid., 21.
life, and actor J. Ron Fleming noted that the works were selected to show a
culture and humanity of a people. The significance of *The Mighty Gents* and *El
Hajj Malik* reflected in the text, production value of movement and music, and the
Jazz Acting approach, connect with the theoretical notions of Critical Memory in
conjunction with Black Habitus.

Curiously, McClintock produced *The Mighty Gents* far more frequently
than Wesley’s defining play *The Black Terror* (1971), and I contend that the
nuances and complexity of power structures in *Gents* reflects Critical Memory
and Black Habitus as it relates to the dilemma of upward mobility due to the
White hegemony.⁴⁸⁰ Both these notions, considered institutions of oppression,
trickled down from slavery that either handicaps opportunities and/or put Black
lives at risk. The audience and actors alike, empathize with a community that is
perhaps unfamiliar, yet critical to the understanding of the African Continuum. In
the case of *The Mighty Gents*, the characters may not liberate themselves.
Specifically, Frankie, the former leader of *The Mighty Gents*, yearns to change his
habitus, yet cannot escape the straightjacket imposed on him by the government,
and ultimately fails to escape his Habitus. However, through the Jazz Acting
technique, McClintock’s actors discovered the nuances of characters that are often
stereotyped, and addresses Critical Memory in order to reveal and establish *The
Mighty Gents* as a contemporary Black Classic.

Through the detailed-oriented Jazz Acting technique, working on *The
Mighty Gents* challenged the actors to connect with often-stereotyped “ghetto”

⁴⁸⁰ Scholars such as Mance Williams mark *Black Terror* as the end of the Black Arts Movement.
characters, and ultimately revealed to Black communities, despite their poverty status, a humanity and complex rhythm of life, and a hypocrisy in the land of free, which I argue is still critical to address in our contemporary moment. McClintock was always conscious of the danger of stereotyping Black characters through White acting techniques. As early as 1972, in William Glover’s article “White Imitations Dropped by Acting School in Harlem,” it is explicitly stated that “Breaking out of racial cliché is the reason for the Afro-American Studio that McClintock manages in Harlem.”\(^{481}\) The Street Life Subgenre as part of the contemporary Black Classics by way of McClintock’s technique therefore directly challenges these stereotypes with the aim of understanding multiple perspectives and varying socioeconomic statuses, to stimulate social progress.

Specifically, McClintock’s emphasis on scrutinizing the text provides an entry point to both empathize with one’s character, and embody the musicality of a culture. Sheldon Woodley articulates the approach of first researching the Street Life subgenre by understanding the context of the 1960s and 1970s: The Street Life subgenre “… of 60s and 70s is talking about struggle, when people struggle they use language and rhythm to interpret what they are feeling. They use art … when you hear people in economic backgrounds when they speak and have a way, it just doesn’t come from nowhere, it comes from rhythm and the way certain cultures speak.”\(^{482}\)

From a content perspective *The Mighty Gents* thwarts the White capitalist structure of upward social and economic mobility from everyday racisms to

\(^{481}\) Glover, “White Imitations Dropped by Acting School in Harlem.”

\(^{482}\) Woodley, interview.
targeted incarceration. This claim is based on the economic proof that the slave trade’s reliance on forced labor and the terrorism of Black lives were used for and yielded an exponential economic gain for the White plantation owners. Although the emancipation proclamation freed slaves in writing, the Jim Crow Laws and economic straightjackets on newly freed slaves did not provide a clean slate or equality. This trajectory paired with the post-traumatic stress of slavery pulses through society in the law enforcement, educational structures, and employment opportunities.\textsuperscript{483} The Harlemites and Black bourgeoisie have differing challenges, but they share the common fight of unequal opportunities in a country that privileges Whites. The capitalist system as an entity creates this discord and establishes class structure interconnected with race.

In \textit{The Mighty Gents}, Wesley’s characters are caught in the cycle of drugs, crime, alcoholism, and unemployment due to the racial and class oppression, and discrimination projected by American institutions. Their particular relationship with the White hegemony handicaps them from liberating themselves from their habitus. For example, the former gang members begin the play discussing their unemployment status, a significant issue discussed and debated in the federal government. In particular, the character Tiny, war veteran, expresses disdain and embarrassment as his peers expose the inefficiency of an unemployment office meant to serve the community:

\begin{verbatim}
FRANKIE. How much you make, Eldrige?
ELDRIDGE. (Evasive) Enough.
TINY. Betch that turkey’s lucky if he made ten dollars.
\end{verbatim}

(Tiny begins to laugh.)
ELDRIDGE. Well, whatever I got more than you got, Tiny, so you shut up.
TINY. That’s okay, man. I got me some money. My veteran’s disability check’s comin’ tomorrow. I’ll be richer than alla you chumps put together.
(Eldridge laughs.)
FRANKIE. Looks like the war did somebody good after all.
TINY. Yea, some good.
FRANKIE. Come on, man, you know what I mean.
TINY. Yea … sure. (Pause.) You shudda seen me in the unemployment office. I felt like I was in a circus doin’ tricks. I hate that place.
ELDRIDGE. Then why keep goin’? You know if they got no jobs for able-bodied civilians, they ain’t hardly holdin’ no jobs for war vets with gimpy legs.
TINY. (Quiettly) Hey man, lighten up. You know I don’t like to talk about that.484

Wesley’s nuanced dialogue criticizes United States government of African Americans who served the ideals of democracy, and therefore evokes the Critical Memory of neglected veterans from varying socioeconomic statuses and geographical locations. Regarding audience identification, the play addresses these issues in a way that exposes the lazy unemployed stereotype as oversimplified. Eldridge articulates futile efforts of day after day, going to the unemployment office that yields “pennies” and denigrates an individual’s self-worth.485

In McClintock’s performance technique, actors approached characters such as Eldridge through understanding the historical context of the Street Life genre, and employing the use of rhythm and musicality to text. A way in which McClintock’s actors such as Sheldon Woodley, connect to rhythm and language

485 Ibid.
in this subgenre is through the primacy on Pronouns. Woodley distinguishes McClintock’s poetic approach from his training at Julliard: “To stress pronouns sounds more poetic, [Julliard] concentrated more on verbs and moves the text.” 486

The concentration on verbs is a common method in Stanislavski-based training, which perhaps one would assume creates a more embodied performance. However, with Jazz Acting, the gestures, habits, and activities do not rely on the text to create theatricality or drama. The actor needs to create their own agency and choices, to be “more than a shell, a body and a voice that moves around …” 487

Additionally, McClintock’s First Word provided an entry point for D.L. Hopkins, who played Frankie in *The Mighty Gents*, which offset stereotypes of the parasite Coon. Hopkins, an actor raised in Virginia, outside the context of *Street Life*, initially did not think he was equipped for such a role. McClintock’s First Word in conjunction with the Character Analysis provided an entry point of authenticity and connection for Hopkins:

[Ernie] really impressed upon us that you have to start before you start. So depending on the piece and what we are doing, you have to deal with what happened before. You can’t just show up and start talking. An hour before, whatever it is you set up in your character analysis. When I did *The Mighty Gents*, everyone in it gave me a moment. I get choked up when I think about it … I didn’t see myself as an actor. Ernie without saying it said you will be leading this show. We read it and then I realized this is the guy. Ernie said you will be fine. I don’t know what he saw in me. But everyone gave me what I needed. Because I’m not a street guy. But you start off with whatever had to happen to get you to that first monologue. That first word had to inform everybody, whatever it was where the hell you came from and why you are here.” 488

486 Ibid.
487 McClintock, “Perspective on Black Acting,” 79.
488 Hopkins, interview.
This contemporary Black Classic provides a baseline melody of a particular sect of society, but speaks to the collective memory and humanity of these individuals. Through Hopkins detailed biography as part of Character Analysis, he was able to establish the First Word to embody a character outside his own experience, and portray a character that subvert the coon stereotype, so often perpetuated in the mainstream.

Zeke, an elderly homeless alcoholic played by Wally Brandon, attempts to liberate himself from the Black Habitus, but cannot break the cycle. Wesley painted Zeke as a compassionate, desperate character who despite his shortcomings shows great humanity. The character is a haunting prophecy of what the younger generation in Newark could become. At the conclusion of the play, Zeke and Frankie struggle over a gun where Frankie is accidentally shot, Zeke claims the gang’s recently acquired loot, and retreats into the alley. Zeke wavers between liberation and entrapment, which demonstrates the ongoing struggle of African Americans to break out of patterns, in an economically depressed city where survival is the primary concern.

The Jazz Acting Technique showcases the nuances of Zeke’s humanity, which results in further offsetting stereotypes in performance. According to Jazz Actor J. Ron Fleming, part of the education of this production (and Wesley’s canon) emphasized the richness in a culture often overlooked. Towards the end of the play, Scene 10 consists of a lengthy monologue where the disheveled and intoxicated character addresses the audience. He tells a story from his youth where at 17 after his father kicked him out of the house; he ended up befriending
junkies in Harlem who protected him in that they never allowed him to touch drugs. After a night of pure heroin, the junkies who were his caretakers overdosed and died in front of him. He remembers in great detail:

The stuff was pure, man, an’ their bodies couldn’t take it. They gagged an’ fell on the floor twitchin’, their eyes bulgin’ outa their sockets, their tongues was stickin’ out an’ saliva was just flowin’ outa their mouths. Well, I sat there for the longest time tryin’ my best to deal with what was happenin’. I got drunk and sat some more an’ finally, I realized why I hadn’t run away. I got up an’ propped alla their bodies up in real, dignified manners: legs crossed, heads titled back, cigarettes in hands. They couldn’t have an’ respect in life, then I’d see to it they had it in death.  

An actor or director could easily gloss over such a monologue in a way that does not consider the humanity within the character, even though the playwright’s melody lends itself to nuance. Fleming noted that “… it turns out [Zeke] was a brilliant human being. So one of the things I learned from the art that Ernie taught us, and the works he selected, was that we have to show the brilliance of culture even in spaces where people don’t see it. … we have so many examples of people who have been traumatized by life and they are extraordinary people.”

Although the play concludes with The Mighty Gents unable to escape their Black Habitus, the liberation occurs in the actor’s process and opening up the audience’s mind for compassion, which can lead to social change and begin to impact oppressive institutions.

The Jazz Acting Technique provides space for actors to connect with a collective memory and relate to institutions of oppression in order to reach the audiences, regardless of their social class or proximity to Newark, New Jersey.

489 Wesley, The Mighty Gents, 44.
As Fleming noted “… the work that we did showed the humanity in every one of us.”\footnote{Fleming, interview.} Braxton, the rival of the Gents, paradoxically exposes the White capitalist system that breeds “survival of the fittest.” Braxton has more financial success than the Gents, but it is reliant on maintaining crime and poverty in the city, to halt upward mobility from the poor class.

As a contemporary Black Classic, \textit{The Mighty Gents} addresses issues in the contemporary American society, in that success in America is measured by monetary wealth and the acquisition of cars, clothes, and lavish consumption.

When the audience meets Braxton, a racketeer, more than half way through the play, the Gents have been referencing him as their target for the robbery. A persona of wealth is established before his monologue entry. The first words of the crook are “I am the American Dream. I read the \textit{New York Times} and subscribe to the \textit{Wall Street Journal}. I drive a Seville … and a Mercedes. I have a comfortable home in the suburbs and a spacious apartment… I wear only the finest suits.”\footnote{Wesley, \textit{The Mighty Gents}, 31.} All of these items are signifiers of wealth and of Whiteness and an accomplishment of breaking free from his habitus. However, he proclaims, “I stand at the gates between the cavemen and civilization. My job is to keep them contained …”\footnote{Ibid.} Therefore he has become a pawn of the White capitalist hegemony. He insists that the audiences should feel grateful for this violent tactics to contain “them,” essentially the remaining poor Black unemployed population.
Braxton is the authority policing and brutalizing the weaker members of the community; he represents a cog in the system to keep poor Black neighborhoods immobilized via rewarding Black-on-Black crime. The play argues that the capitalist system is the real impetus for violence in Black communities. For the system, Braxton protects the massive gap between the Black poor and the White rich. The very structure itself imposes the pressure on Braxton and he is a victim of the system he thinks he is manipulating. He is motivated by the capitalist structure, which maintains a social caste system promoting Black-on-Black crime.

Richard Wesley’s *The Mighty Gents*, essential to the Street Life subgenre, gives voice to sects of society that are still neglected in the United States. For example, in Donald Trump’s first month in office he asserted with certainty that there are “two Chicagos … One Chicago that is incredible, luxurious, and safe. There is another Chicago that is worse than almost any of the places in the Middle East.” In addition to perpetuating the Middle East as a monolithic region, he categorizes the “ghetto” of Chicago as horrible, with no jobs and no education. He positions himself as the White savior who will “solve the problem of the inner city.” The elected president is perpetuating these stereotypes and further

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493 Black-on-black crime is a term used by the conservative right to highlight crimes in inner cities by minorities on minorities. As Professor David Wilson remarked, “Every time the term Black-on-Black crime is used, the term that comes to human consciousness is race. The term really privileges the notion that race is at the core of the process.” However, studies on the 1960s and 1970s in Harlem reveal law enforcement agencies such as the FBI, placing drugs in urban neighborhoods to promote such crimes. Notably, white on white crime is called crime, without a racial descriptor.

marginalizing those below the poverty line, not to mention assuming all poor people are Black. Trump’s unabashed disregard and denigration of a people on several levels is debated and discussed on news stations.

As a visionary and pioneer of the Black Arts Movement, Ernie McClintock addressed these issues, gave agency to the economically depressed, and for his actors and audiences, *The Mighty Gents* “… opens your eyes and forces you to deal with, make some decisions, embrace or at least consider what is happening around you …”495 In practice, he welcomed the overlooked members of this sect and gave them a family, a purpose, and a voice. Thaddeus Daniels remembers that McClintock often wandered the streets of his community to connect and “… be with my people … feel, smell, breathe, and taste.”496 In his inclusion of Street Life, the efforts to know the community, observe their body language, listen to the rhythm of their speech, all contributed to the way in which the technique serves the complex and compassionate characters in *The Mighty Gents*.

While *The Mighty Gents* is situated in the particular context of dilapidated Newark, N. R. Davidson’s *EL Hajj Malik* journeys through a portion of Malcolm X’s life from adolescence in Nebraska, to his assassination in Harlem. *The Mighty Gents* and *El Hajj Malik* may seem divergent in terms of the former members of a gang who feel like “nobodys” as opposed to arguably one of the most recognizable Black Power leaders in history. However, the White oppressor’s efforts to prevent social mobility and remain in a cycle of crime most

495 Green, interview.
496 Daniels, interview.
certainly tie them together. Wesley’s play concludes with the Black Habitus self-regenerating, and Davidson’s biographical story ends with the leader slain, despite his liberation from societal expectations.

McClintock’s technique and production value paired with this ensemble-driven poetic piece reclaims Malcolm X’s story, and in multiple ways frees up the restraints of the Black Habitus. To start, the story of Malcolm X is an example of a radical icon whose nuclear family members were victims of the White supremacy’s genocidal acts. The surviving Little family members were abruptly separated, and Malcolm X found himself in a world of *The Mighty Gents* where he engaged in crime, drugs, and debauchery. He defied the hegemony’s prescription and emerged as one of the most impactful leaders in the nation’s history. Furthermore, the play performs as a liberator of Black Habitus in the jazz tradition because of the mainstream media’s distorted perception of Malcolm X as simply an aggressive Black militant. McClintock’s dozens of productions in New York and Richmond served as a critical instrument to restore the legacy of Malcolm X. The selection of this historical figure and reclamation of that narrative, paired with the Jazz Acting Technique created an overlap of experiences that is essential in Critical Memory, which resulted in life-altering moments for both audience and actors. The absence of *El Hajj Malik* in the canon risks relegating Malcolm X’s legacy to a stereotype, and the inclusion of this contemporary Black Classic promotes education and community healing, foundational aspects of McClintock’s belief system.
A queer, secular director producing a story about a religious, Muslim icon of traditional Black masculinity may seem paradoxical, yet considering Ernie McClintock’s commitment to Black History and his admiration for revolutionary misfits, *El Hajj Malik* is indeed a contemporary Black Classic. McClintock’s refusal to compromise his opinions and cower in the face of the oppressor echoes Malcolm X’s unwavering courage. Marc Primus, founding figure of the Afro-American Studio for Acting and Speech remarked:

I think that Malcolm X was and still is our prince. Malcolm X is still our lord. He was my Lord and Ernie’s Lord too. We both admired him in spite of the fact that he was a Muslim and we didn’t believe in religion. He was close to our hearts. He always was and we tried to follow him and be as honest as he was and he was our model. If Ernie were alive today he would sit here and tell you that Malcolm X is the only prince that we have ever had.  

Primus’ reverence and his certainty of McClintock’s same belief, emphasizes the historical significance of Malcolm X’s life story, and the necessity to educate actors and audiences rooted in the authenticity of a Black acting technique. Malcolm X’s uncompromising stance on the racism woven into every facet of American life including language and crime echoes McClintock’s expectations of all those around him, and the explosive temper when challenged. Primus noted that they aligned themselves with Malcolm X’s ideology, as opposed to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s initial peace-driven strategy. The gravitation towards Malcolm X and his ideological stance relates to the Jazz Acting Technique in terms of self-determination, owning personal agency, and making bold choices.

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497 Primus, interview.
without regard for White incumbent frameworks, whether in governmental or artistic contexts.

Primus, McClintock, and Walker were of the revolutionary ilk in theory and in practice, even though the militant sects of the Black Arts Movement viewed the company as a-political. Primus contends that Ernie, Ronald, and the historian were all adamantly opposed to turning the other cheek. In fact, “nobody knows about Ernie but he was a sharp shooter. His students didn’t even know that was his main talent outside of directing, shooting a gun. Most people don’t even know it.” Primus echoes Davidson’s sentiments in the play itself when Actor One addresses the audience and says, “Revolution is never based on begging somebody for an integrated cup of coffee. Revolutions are never fought by turning the other cheek … never negotiations, never based upon that which is begging a corrupt society or corrupt system to accept us into it.” Both McClintock and Malcolm X took a proactive approach, albeit one was secular and the other religious. Even though they differ in particular sexual orientations, faith, means (political versus cultural), their philosophy derived from the need to uplift their communities, and refusing to negotiate with institutions of racism.

Similar to misconceptions about Ernie McClintock, the legacy of the revolutionary leader requires the inclusion of his character outside the aggressive, angry Black man. Reductive understandings of Malcolm X span from anti-White separatists to religious fundamentalists to violent-seeking thugs. The sardonic

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498 Ibid.
499 Ibid.
final line of *El Hajj Malik* states, “All about a Negro, an ex-convict, ex-dope peddler who became a racial fanatic…(sigh).” Contrarily, Marc Primus recalls he was “the sweetest person I ever met” after a three-hour late night/early morning comical discussion of how “… our experience with White girls was the same. They were on us like White on rice and we laughed and carried on for three hours.” Whereas Malcolm X is painted as any angry fanatic, McClintock was rumored as a sexual deviant who required orgies for admittance into his company. In reality, McClintock and Ronald Walker were in a committed relationship for forty years. Although Malcolm X and Ernie McClintock may seem like two men who would ideologically be at odds, their legacies are joined by the commitment to self-determination, love of their people, and empowering abandoned communities.

Both figures never denied their past or shortcomings, and perhaps the most powerful aspect of Malcolm X’s life story is his liberation from a Black Habitus that described him as a criminal and pimp. In Alex Haley’s autobiography, depicted in the Spike Lee film and documented in his own speeches, Malcolm X dealt and ingested drugs, committed burglary, and worked as a pimp managing prostitutes in Boston and New York. These descriptions are not unlike the demographic of men in prison who are mostly men of color from broken homes, with limited opportunities for higher education and economic upward mobility.

Malcolm X was born into a traditionally nuclear family in Nebraska with god-

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501 Ibid., 245.
502 Primus, interview.
503 Simon, interview.
fearing parents. However, when the Ku Klux Klan murdered his father, his family was ripped apart and he was placed in foster care. The White hegemony blatantly attempted to thrust Malcolm Little into circumstances and institutions that mass-produces criminals. The remarkable awakening in prison and his discovering of Islam catapulted his life’s purpose for his Black community. His life story perhaps unknowingly wringing out, absorbed projections of criminality from his ontological and spiritual self.

The community outreach was an important part of the Afro-American Studio and the Jazz Actors Theatre in which the actors revered the theater as a powerful medium, where ensemble and community were synonymous, magnified by *El Hajj Malik* in content and performance. Alondra Edwards, daughter of Bolanyle, as a preteen attended rehearsals of *El Hajj Malik*, which she acknowledges as one of the most profound influences on her life: “[It] was the most profound piece for me. I work in psychology, and when I walk the room think in terms of Ernie, in terms of ensemble and family…what he did was magic and it was effortless and it exuded from him. The strong sense of ensemble spoke volumes to the community.”

Davidson’s text explicitly insists on an ensemble production in which eight men all play Malcolm X, while two women played the female roles, including Malcolm X’s beloved Betty Shabazz. McClintock took this notion a step further as noted by New York Times Critic, Clive Barnes who posed the question how a theatrical event even considers representing Malcolm X: “[McClintock] solved this basic theatrical question beautifully. They make

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everyone Malcolm X.”\textsuperscript{506} In Jazz Acting, Bolanyle Edwards explains that the transition an actor makes from character to character is through a shift in the rhythm of the body, the physicality, and speech. “A moment before the character change I would close my eyes and see the other character and begin making/hearing speech, vocal changes, and body changes in my mind.”\textsuperscript{507} McClintock, in the true Jazz Acting tradition, brought this ensemble to life every time he produced \textit{El Hajj Malik}, and every performance accessed physicality, rhythm, and speech to riff within Davidson’s melody.

![Figure 10: Cast of El Hajj Malik, 1971. Source: From the Private Collection of Al Suavae Mitchell.](image)

In Ernie McClintock’s theatre and through this particular contemporary Black Classic, McClintock identified an ideal script to fully realize the ensemble.


\textsuperscript{507}Bolanyle Edwards, interview.
aesthetic in performances that actors and critics akin to Barnes called “… an intellectually and emotionally provocative production.”

The integration of music, dance, activists, and gestures, all emanating from these individual actors to tell the story of Malcolm X undulated between the individual’s perspective, a liberation from social expectations, and a prideful celebration of collective people who had suffered similarly, but knew their self-worth which was passed down from the tenacity of their ancestors. Primus reminisced, “Ernie made it into a kind of musical thing, N. R. Davidson wrote it, but Ernie created it. I’ve never seen another El Hajj that was like Ernie’s. He was no usual person now. The other experiences I had in theatre was nothing like with Ernie McClintock. Because Ernie McClintock theatre was about the development of a person as opposed to an actor creating just a character. He was more than just a theatre director.”

As Primus suggests, McClintock’s artistic vision extends beyond just a director’s vision or political theatre, but an art form that riffs between and with individual experiences, to form an overlap of the ties that bind multiple Black experiences.

To perform the epic life of Malcolm X is undoubtedly a daunting feat for a pedestrian, but the text and Jazz Acting lends itself to embracing and requiring individual actors’ perspectives, allowing for the overlap of one man’s story to speak to the greater community. The physical connection to character before speaking the lines is a way for an actor to connect with the role. Just as in everyday human interactions, "You are known by what you do, not by what you

509 Primus, interview.
say. None of us allows ourselves to believe totally in those words that are spoken to us; if so, we are foolish. More often, indeed, we judge people by their actions." In order for actors to realize their full potential on stage, the resident dance instructor at the Afro-American Studio, Milo Timmons choreographed *El Hajj Malik* to incorporate stylized movement in concert with music.\(^5\)

For an actor, the entry point to represent Malcolm X can be intimidating, and for Woody Carter, McClintock guided him through discovering music, rhythm, and kinesthetic connection. Carter played Malcolm X imprisoned in a cell extending five feet long and four feet wide. After working with McClintock, they identified a piece of music by Archie Shepp that would unsettle him in an authentic way.

[The song was] very chaotic, I like things with melody that I can … he didn’t have any melody. He was playing sax and by the end I listened to the piece and thought where it sounds like the guy is in an insane asylum but for that particular scene it was particularly helpful. For the scene I measured out that space and put on Shepp’s piece and think about what was expressing in the scene through the body language. First time in a play that I was literally in tears, but it startled me – I heard that song in my head.\(^6\)

In the interview he reiterates his aversion for the high energy and frenetic jazz.

With the focus on his own taste in music and his visceral response, he was able to connect to the unsettling entrapment of a young Malcolm X. Furthermore, in the foreword of the play, Davidson specifies that Archie Shepp’s music is an essential component of the narrative, presumably for that very reason.

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5\(^1\) McClintock, “Perspective on Black Acting,” 81.
5\(^1\) Bolanyle Edwards, interview.
5\(^2\) Carter, interview.
When asked about McClintock’s choice of *El Hajj Malik*, Woody Carter said that after some reflection, it was most likely to do with the notion that everyone should play Malcolm, men and women.\(^{513}\) The significance of gender fluidity structurally woven into the play directly speaks to McClintock’s Queer Black Power Aesthetic. Through Malcolm X’s liberation from the perpetuation of the Black Habitus in performance, the ensemble embodies Critical Memory. Similarities of experience are identified without a presumption that all Black bodies have the same memories, yet there is an acknowledgment of a common struggle. The process of finding that overlap and rhythm of the play included rehearsing the scenes in reverse. Mary Hodges recalls rehearsals as a process of confronting the text and the process, without hesitation or second-guessing:

> We were working on a show. The rehearsal time was spent on breaking the play down in units and attacking the play. He might start with one specific thing and say this is where we do the play backwards. And it’s like a rewind. In *El Hajj* you go back and do the scenes really fast and then go back to the end. Where everybody gets to do a Malcolm X speech.\(^{514}\)

His ensemble approach in terms of multiple actors playing the same role through the course of a play was not unique to *El Hajj Malik*, although the symbolic implications are the most powerful in this particular piece. For example, he would direct Shakespeare in a similar fashion, where an actress would play the Queen and King simultaneously at the University of Richmond where audiences described it as “mesmerizing.”\(^{515}\) His revision of a Shakespeare piece where an actor plays both Queen and King progresses that idea of giving a Black woman

\(^{513}\) Ibid.

\(^{514}\) Hodges, interview.

\(^{515}\) Jazz Actors Theatre, interview.
agency in a monarchy, and in turn, this gender fluidity revises Shakespeare in the Queer Black Power Aesthetic framework. The principles behind the Jazz Acting technique therefore informed his productions from Davidson to Shakespeare.

Through the Jazz Acting technique, the story of one man’s relinquishing of the Black Habitus became a unifying jazz narrative linking the collective identity. As Harvey Young says, “Identity is not transparent but rather a ‘production,’ which is never complete, it is always in process.”516 The visibility of the Black body has been forced, and as W. E. B. Du Bois notes, mirrors Derome Scott Smith’s life-changing experience:

I was on a journey. I was in college. I asked my professors. I need some Black plays and I’m the only Black person in the theatre department and nobody could tell me anything. Then I met Ernie and it was a wrap. And I saw this show, which is the epitome of what jazz is. It hummed, it moved it never stopped. All they had was some black, little color, some props. And I thought “What am I watching? What is this?” I had to understand I never seen anything like this.517

Smith’s revelation while watching El Hajj Malik directly speaks to McClintock’s ultimate goal of situating self-determination healing power and ability to give agency to Black actors. The contemporary Black Classics in performance, brought to life by McClintock’s Jazz Acting Technique, becomes a powerful conduit of self-determination and community building, reminiscent of the Black Arts Movement, which mobilizes individuals in a community to assert their agency.

Although the immediate community in Richmond and in Harlem found El Hajj Malik to be a transformative experience, the well-known reviewer Gottfried

516 Young, Embodying Black Experience, 16.
517 Smith, interview.
Martin of *Women’s Wear Daily* critiqued the production. He saw the Afro-American Studio’s 1971 production at the Martinique Theatre and wrote, “This production has now been moved into the White community … It had been staged in the style of production companies, a group creation using dance movement, incantation, and ensemble improvisation. McClintock has done this on an elementary level, and especially through the first act, it is slow and aimless, as much the directors fault as the author’s.”

He further notes that the musical dance scenes in a café were irrelevant, yet those interviewed for this project emphasized the electricity and community-focused aesthetic that McClintock brought to the story.

Although reviews are subjective, the criteria for judging a play from the standpoint of a White western gaze is problematic; McClintock addressed the fundamental challenges of such reviews in an article in the Black Theatre Alliance magazine in 1979 entitled, “Published Criticism and its Positive Effect on Black Theatre.” In the article, McClintock argues that published criticism serves a major function in the theatre in that (1) it serves historical value, recording an event, and offers a record for future generations; (2) a critique that is either positive or interesting enough can motivate theatre-goers to support the theatre; and (3) there is aesthetic value of measuring the quality of the production. He states, “Black Theatre is about Black people, performed, written and produced by Black people, intended for the consumption of Blacks in order to educate, agitate,

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520 Ibid.
stimulate and/or provoke them into a greater understanding of themselves and their situation in the hope of motivating them to attain and assist others in attaining a better life.”

Although Martin’s critique of the 1971 El Hajj Malik acknowledges the need to tell Malcolm X’s story, he fails to situate the critique within this definition, or even acknowledge that mainstream Black theatre is a different theatrical experience from White theatre. Furthermore, as Clive Barnes notes, the explosive shape of the play carried out in McClintock’s production is typical of black theater practice, but may seem alien to White audiences.

Barnes’ observation about White audiences relates to McClintock’s initial motivation to create an Afrocentric technique. If Black actors are being trained by White methods in White plays in the Aristotelian structure, then these critics are reinforcing the notion that artistic excellence must be measured in terms of White standards and practices. Hence, a Black acting method had to be created outside the White gaze. Furthermore, in 1979, McClintock urged the Black Theatre Alliance to recruit critics and run a Black Theatre aesthetic development workshop, symposium, forum, or conference with actors, designers, choreographers, and audience representatives from a variety for theatres to discuss these standards.

McClintock further required that critics of the Black theatre should be Black, socially and politically conscious, keenly aware of Black history and current events, and have an excellent education in all aspects of theatrical

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521 Ibid.
522 Barnes, “The Dramatic Life and Death of Malcolm X.”
production.\textsuperscript{523} With these criteria, the reviewers would have to understand the
tenets of ensemble, community building, and “upliftment”:

Black theatre for me is raising consciousness, awareness. If you follow
the history and what is going on, it’s reflected in the theatre. Our theatre
is written specifically for our upliftment, education, and to broaden our
scope. “Encourage people to travel”—Malcolm X said, travel will broaden
your scope. Most people in the Black community don’t have money to
travel … The Black experience you have to look at the movement from
the time of slavery to one of these precious freedoms. Theatre from [The
Black Arts Movement] is highly political and instructive for the upliftment
… For us to embrace ourselves as we are as opposed to trying to imitate
another culture.\textsuperscript{524}

In Joan Green’s estimation, the contemporary Black Classics is inextricably
linked to the Jazz Acting technique, and is best demonstrated by the ‘upliftment’
achieved within the actors and audience’s experiences. J. Ron Fleming further
echoes Green’s assessment in that the Jazz Actors Theatre informed him not to be
“ordinary.” The Richmond actors connect to the Harlem actors through the desire
to bring McClintock’s call for the Black Theatre and Classics into “an element of
what I do” inside and outside the walls of the theatre.\textsuperscript{525}

Whether in New York or Richmond, McClintock’s Jazz Acting is an
instrument of liberation of the legacy of Malcolm X, due to the selection of this
historical character’s narrative and reclaiming that narrative. The text in tandem
with the Jazz Acting Technique served to establish an overlap that is essential in
Critical Memory, and finally evidenced in the audience’s first-hand experience,
and life-changing moments for casts across generations. The absence of \textit{El Hajj
Malik} in the canon and in production would surely result in a critical gap in the

\textsuperscript{523} McClintock, “Published Criticism and its Positive Effect on Black Theatre,” 2.
\textsuperscript{524} Green, interview.
\textsuperscript{525} Fleming, interview.
legacy of the slain leader, and the ‘upliftment’ and empowerment he bestowed on his community.

Conclusion

*Do Lord Remember Me, Slaveship, The Mighty Gents, and El Hajj Malik* serve as four prime examples of the contemporary Black Classics that are bound by the notions of Collective and Critical Memory. McClintock’s directorial style and actors trained in the Jazz Acting tradition are able to embody their individual artistic expression, and through this authentic connection to self, speak to audiences about the greater need to include these narratives of suffering, and triumph in the theatrical cannon. Whether the play is documenting historical figures (*Do Lord Remember Me* and *El Hajj Malik*) or fictionalized narratives based on historical events (*Slaveship* and *The Mighty Gents*), they provide insight into the lived experiences of the antebellum and post-antebellum period, as well as the politically charged Black Power era. Given the state of our country in 2017, the relevance of Black bodies as targets of hegemony is a main concern in African American communities, and is debated among political commentators and politicians on popular networks such as CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News. In order to speak to the present moment and engage fully in these discussions, these contemporary Black Classics serve to chronicle the history of oppression, to disrupt the hegemony and perhaps most importantly articulate the tenacity and ‘upliftment’ of a people.
CONCLUSION

Ernie McClintock established the Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech in Harlem during the onset of Black Arts Movement and preached the “Theatre of Common Sense.” His model of actor training developed with a focus on acting, movement, voice and speech, scene study, and Black history classes with a performance workshop for the advanced students. In the late 1960s, the advanced workshop eventually evolved into the 127th Street Repertory Ensemble with productions such as El Hajj Malik, Equus, and spell no. 7. McClintock’s repertory theatre brought both accolades and criticism to the director and his actors. Due to the shifting political climate in the 1980s, the government slashed funding to the arts, which precipitated the disbandment of the Black Theatre Alliance. McClintock and Walker relocated to Richmond, Virginia, a seemingly odd choice. However, McClintock identified a gap in Black theatre in the capital of the confederacy, where performative protests and the Jazz Acting Technique: A Common sense Approach affected this southern town-like shifting tectonic plates and forever shaped the lives of young actors.\textsuperscript{526}

The significance of Ernie McClintock’s Jazz Acting Technique and repertoire in the sociopolitical context of the Black Arts Movement during Reaganomics opens up possibilities and opportunities for future artists and scholars. In his Afrocentric worldview and Black queer positionality, McClintock’s acting technique and philosophy emphasized the individual identity

\textsuperscript{526}Dr. Indira Ettaroo describes both McClintock and Sonia Sanchez as two influences in her life that moved her soul like a shift in tectonic plates. She refers to McClintock as a “disruptor,” in which upon meeting and working with him, her life was forever altered. I am using this same analogy to describe McClintock’s legacy and influence on his students. Dr. Indira Ettaroo, interview by Elizabeth Cizmar, February 15, 2017.
of an actor while simultaneously fostering a collective ensemble. Productions reflected the Black Aesthetic, queer perspectives, and womanist voices. These differing points of view at times conflicted with one another; however, friction and tension manifest the jazz aesthetic in performance. Furthermore, I argue that McClintock’s determination to establish the contemporary Black Classics demonstrated a critical contribution to urging educational institutions, and research agendas to consider Afrocentric storytelling and histories. His legacy in the African continuum recognizes, much like Du Bois, Black History as being inextricably tied to American History in terms of economic growth, the arts, and American culture.

For acting teachers and academics, the inclusion of multiple perspectives and exploring Afrocentric techniques offers students with diverse backgrounds and experiences, ways to develop their craft outside the predominant Stanislavsky-based approaches. Both as a trained actor and an acting teacher, I have experienced and witnessed the potential limitations of an actor adhering to one school of thought. Similarly, in terms of theory, as Judith Butler articulates, labeling categories and establishing binaries do not account for the complexity of human experiences, which inevitably do not subscribe to a fixed definition. McClintock, a well-known figure in Harlem during the 1960s, therefore challenged monolithic understandings of the Black Arts Movement. Giving consideration to figures such as McClintock and the notion of a Queer Black Power Aesthetic can shift how scholars see the world, and how artists create theatre.
Excavating McClintock’s technique, repertoire, and Black queer positionality, spanning four decades, etches a pathway for future creative and scholarly projects. For example, acting teachers and directors often evoke the notion that actors must be “in the moment” on stage. Yet within mainstream approaches to theatre, stage managers log specific blocking and lighting cues. These conventions make it difficult for actors to appear as if they are speaking their characters’ lines for the first time. In my teaching experience, the primary challenge novice actors encounter is breaking free from line readings and their idealized conception of emotional truth. In McClintock’s Jazz Acting Technique in training and performance, the work honors and relishes in the ephemerality of theatre. I suspect applying jazz aesthetics is just one of many ways to break conventions that often times yield predictable performances in both amateur and professional theatres.

In future studies, my research on McClintock’s technique and productions can encourage scholars to consider cultural groups outside their lived experiences, and contribute to shifting research agendas at universities in the White western tradition. Certainly, many institutions include non-western forms in their curricula, but holistically, alternative American acting traditions that are culturally rooted are underexplored, and therefore not practiced in formal training. Moreover, increased attention towards actors who do not necessarily train within formal Stanislavsky-based approaches would contribute to the cultural complexity of theatre outside the mainstream. Including alternative voices in discourse can provide opportunities to interrogate particularly controversial movements, both in
the past and present, for example Black Lives Matter, as performative entities. As scholars and historians, researching culturally specific traditions allows for increased fluidity between binaries.

Towards the end of my process, my attention yet again was drawn to the social media outlet. On Facebook, an activist and personal friend of mine posted an image of Tupac Shakur’s lyrics, written by hand on poster board. The lyrics are from his 1993 song “Keep Ya Head Up” on the album *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.* He dedicated the song to his godson Elijah and “a little girl Corinne,” the future generations in the African Continuum:

And since we all came from a woman
Got our name from a woman and our game from a woman
I wonder why we take from our women
Why we rape our women, do we hate our women?
I think it's time to kill for our women
Time to heal our women, be real to our women …

The idea of healing women and the community surfaces in Shakur’s lyrics a year earlier in the song “Changes,” when he said, “And only time we chill is when we kill each other … It takes skill to be real, time to heal each other …” McClintock’s training for Black actors developed the skills to self-define through healing with the intention of then healing their communities. In terms of the structure and form of “Changes,” it lives in the jazz tradition because it disrupts Bruce Hornsby’s 1986 hit “The Way It Is,” and to echo Harris’s definition, converts a white poetic and social idea into a Black one. I began to think about

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McClintock’s relationship with hip-hop when considering his mentorship of Tupac Shakur, but also in relationship to our current political climate. With the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and my discovery of McClintock’s influence on Tupac Shakur, his efforts to capture multiple perspectives in a charged political and racial climate highlights the urgency to include his practice and theory in theatres and classrooms across the country.

Figure 11: Tupac Shakur and Ernie McClintock, 1996.
*Source:* From the Private Collection of Al Suavae Mitchell.

The image of Tupac Shakur and McClintock standing in front of a poster for *El Hajj Malik* presents a powerful visual representation of McClintock’s legacy. In this photograph, during the height of Shakur’s fame, he returned to Richmond to visit his early mentor who was philosophically aligned with Black Power, while including multiple perspectives from Black life. Through the process, with the exception of *Where Its At*, in my dissertation I primarily focused
on the repertoire as it related to written text. Upon reflecting on my process, I suspect my gravitation towards published plays is a result of my training in traditional approaches to theatre, yet limits an exhaustive study of the Jazz Acting Technique in theory and practice.

Due to limited space and time, my dissertation did not chronicle McClintock as an early supporter of the hip-hop theatre. I would have liked to further explore the development and sustainability of his poetry theatre, evidenced by *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, and *Ndangered2002*. To that end, in the interview with Marc Primus he referenced the director’s connection with contemporary and McClintock’s productions: “Where Its At. He did that over and over again and different every time. He came back to New York after years of being in Virginia. It was hip hop … He was interested in converting hip-hop to theatre.”

Hip-hop scholars Alice Price-Styles and Nicole Hodges Persley trace the origins of hip hop to the jazz musical form from the Harlem Renaissance to the gestalt of the Black Arts Movement. By examining the work of hip-hop scholars, future studies can situate McClintock’s students and productions in the 1990s and 2000s as centering on the spoken word and hip-hop’s conventions. Furthermore, by looking at hip-hop theatre as it relates to the acting theory of McClintock further links him to Black Power philosophy and well-known artists of the Black Arts Movement including Sonia Sanchez and Amiri Baraka.

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530 Primus, interview.
532 Pryce-Styles MC Origins: rap and spoken word poetry,” GET PAGE
In addition to hip-hop theatre, my research warrants further investigation of interdisciplinary subjects in music, other cultural groups, and actors under McClintock’s tutelage. In his lived moment, culturally centered theatre companies such as Luis Valdez’s Teatro Campesino during McClintock’s lifetime in the context of New York would further open up his legacy in a broader theatrical and cultural context. In terms of his own repertoire, McClintock considered other significant works as part of the contemporary Black Classics. Other plays within this genre include Errol John’s *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* (1957), Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), Roscoe Lee Browne’s *A Hand is on the Gate* (1966), Ron Milner’s *Who’s Got His Own* (1966), Paul Carter Harrison’s *Tabernacle* (1969), Clay Goss’s *On Being Hit* (1970), and Derek Walcott’s *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1971).

In addition to technique and repertoire, McClintock’s inclusion of Caribbean actors’ and Caribbean born playwrights’ worldview in the context of the Queer Black Power Aesthetic would provide yet another perspective and the lived experience he gave voice to in his training and productions. Lola Loui, an actor and teacher from Trinidad, made a point in our interview that aside from McClintock, directors did not typically cast Caribbean actors. Loui further theorized that many producers and directors precluded Caribbean plays and experiences from their seasons. As far as technique, I would like to hone in on, and further specify the exercises as they are applied in training and in performance. If I have the opportunity to further review archival materials from private collections, I hope to gain further insight into McClintock’s own words,
particularly by accessing a training guide for actors that he started in the early 1970s.

It is critical to explore the interdisciplinary nature of the Jazz Acting Technique in my next phases of research, particularly in the areas of music and movement. With more time and space, I would like to pursue music theory in terms of jazz and the blues, as well as pursue the interdisciplinary nature of the Jazz Acting Technique. Ronald K. Brown, Broadway choreographer, worked with McClintock extensively and I had the fortune of meeting him at the Billie Holiday Theatre in Bedford-Stuyvesant when interviewing jazz actor Dr. Indira Etwaroo. Brown is the choreographer and artistic director of the Evidence Dance Company, and perhaps is more widely known for his choreography on the 2012 revival of *Porgy and Bess*. Brown worked with McClintock in Richmond and New York, and continues to collaborate with Etwaroo at the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corp.

Other areas for future scholars to pursue McClintock’s work would include his collaboration with his partner, Ronald Walker, who was the technical director of the theatres, and trained students in design. For example, Geno Brantley’s award winning sound and lighting design resulted from Walker’s tutelage. Brantley’s designs therefore are not an outcome of formal, traditional training such as a BFA or an MFA in lighting/sound/set design. It is worth exploring how McClintock’s jazz aesthetics applied to the design process and in performance. Furthermore, based on interviews and Ronald Walker’s career and influence on actors and designers, future studies could research Walker’s design
and methods, as well as his collaborations with McClintock. Before McClintock’s passing, he was adamant that his life and artistic partner be remembered alongside him. The collaboration achieved between McClintock and Walker similarly had dissonant moments. As far as during performance, due to the ever-evolving practice, the design elements (lighting and sound) would inevitable shift from performance to performance.

From a theoretical perspective, the Queer Black Power Aesthetic opens up possibilities for scholars to interrogate artists who may appear incompatible with political and/or artistic movements. I would like to further explore this theoretical framework as it extends to those that carry on the Jazz Acting Technique legacies including actors, designers, directors, and producers. In particular, there is an opportunity to conduct more research at the Billie Holiday Theatre and Etwaroo’s community building in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Hence, further investigation warrants looking into how these forms, theories, and practices continue to develop and evolve.

In my initial inquiry into the work and life of McClintock, I aimed to identify and contextualize an enigmatic director-teacher who had been previously glossed over in acting theory and the Black Arts Movement history. I argue his vacillation between binaries and genres through the Jazz Acting Technique posed a conundrum within the Black Arts Movement. While my argument of McClintock’s Black Queer theoretical framework offers complex interrogation of the limitations of fixed definitions, my research offers the potential to pursue future studies of the Jazz Acting Technique, and other seemingly contradictory
figures in controversial historical moments. The excavation of McClintock’s acting technique, productions, and his legacy further contributes to the core of the jazz aesthetic, which requires dissonant moments. In the Jazz Acting Technique, these battling perspectives work to grant actors agency in their own work, while offering the opportunity, from a culturally grounded perspective, to heal and honor the tenacity and ‘upliftment’ of a people.
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A. Peter Bailey, critic
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