

## Cultural Scripts: Black Body Dialogues Report

### Overview

Black Body explores historical, mythological, and aspirational representations of the body through two movement-based multidisciplinary performances. Heritage Works will convene two rounds of artists and residents to explore embodied individual and community concepts through movement and arts-based methods: Corpus and Civitas. The first one, Corpus, brings to Detroit Holly Bass and Lela Aisha Jones – two choreographers that represent different movement languages and **different experiences of slavery, colonization, and incarceration**. Together with local poet Rhonda Greene and Detroit communities, they will use these arts-based methods to explore, interpret, and share embodied themes **within Detroit contexts**.

### Dialogue Method

Through participatory, experiential dance-based conversations and story circles, audiences will share their experiences in relationship to project's theme of Black Body. Audiences will interact through four parts of the story circle: Introduction, Listening & Telling, Crosstalk, and Transformative Action. Transformative action always ends the circle, providing an opportunity for people to interact by doing something with what has been shared; like sharing a thought, movement or poem.

### Participants

There were 6 dialogues in 5 locations with a total of 108 Participants. The number of participants for each dialogue location are represented below (color scheme used throughout report for reference).



#### COLOR CODE

**Bates Academy (32)**



**Winans Academy of Performing Arts (29)**



**Focus HOPE (14)**



**The Carr Center – Youth (13)**



**The Carr Center – Adult Dancers (13)**



**Mariners Inn (7)**

## Movement Gestures

At the start of the program participants were asked to provide one movement gestures from the American African culture. Below is a description of the gestures.

Focus Hope - Youth	Mariners Inn	The Carr Center - Adult Dancers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A smooth walk</li> <li>▪ A bored way of sitting</li> <li>▪ Diva hand gesture</li> <li>▪ Praying hands</li> <li>▪ Stroking a beard</li> <li>▪ Throw up your hands (long day)</li> <li>▪ Sit down in tired way</li> <li>▪ Eye rolling (forget you)</li> <li>▪ Hand on face (embarrassed)</li> <li>▪ Lean walk</li> <li>▪ Kapeesh hands</li> <li>▪ Head patting (head itching)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The mama look</li> <li>▪ Brother and me playing videos</li> <li>▪ What's up hand gesture from across the room</li> <li>▪ "Child please" with head tilt</li> <li>▪ The lips and eyes look</li> <li>▪ standing with 1 foot out and hand on the hip</li> <li>▪ Lean back and observe the room, read people</li> <li>▪ shake of the head, Creole style</li> <li>▪ slow dance invitation from dad</li> <li>▪ wag the finger</li> <li>▪ look up and down to a person. What you want?</li> <li>▪ Fist bump</li> <li>▪ Detroit handshake</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Aunt on the porch, Dad dancing-smooth</li> <li>▪ Peace sign</li> <li>▪ Hands covering eyes, black body healing - yunga lu - tummy in circle</li> <li>▪ belly dance hander</li> <li>▪ hold your head up. It you did not kill anyone, hold head up.</li> <li>▪ look down to check the boys</li> <li>▪ mama- butt bunt</li> <li>▪ head turn and look</li> <li>▪ dad in car- head and fist</li> <li>▪ crazy uncle mac shuffle</li> <li>▪ HmMMM</li> <li>▪ eye and hand</li> <li>▪ Hand moved down</li> </ul>

## Major Themes from the Stories

Focus Hope - Youth	Mariner's Inn	Bates Academy	Winans Academy of Performing Arts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Scared</li> <li>▪ Touched</li> <li>▪ Segregation</li> <li>▪ Proud</li> <li>▪ Strong</li> <li>▪ Truth</li> <li>▪ Hard</li> <li>▪ Power</li> <li>▪ Color</li> <li>▪ Race</li> <li>▪ Hair</li> <li>▪ Mexican</li> <li>▪ White</li> <li>▪ Black</li> <li>▪ Being made fun of</li> <li>▪ Being bullied</li> <li>▪ Adversity</li> <li>▪ White water fountain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Same struggle as before</li> <li>▪ Singing lifts the Spirit</li> <li>▪ Black Connection through church and dance</li> <li>▪ Being watch at store. Feeling American outside of America</li> <li>▪ Family solid values. Not understanding what is happening in the moment</li> <li>▪ Blessed by bus drivers. Cursed by hospital Interview</li> <li>▪ "She helped me be who I am"</li> <li>▪ Build each other up</li> <li>▪ Represent Blacks to the world</li> <li>▪ White nonculture. There is difference</li> <li>▪ Excitement to See Black American outside of U.S.</li> <li>▪ Remember not being welcome</li> <li>▪ Whites do not speak about culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maid</li> <li>▪ Black</li> <li>▪ Different</li> <li>▪ Fun</li> <li>▪ Fear</li> <li>▪ Anger sadness</li> <li>▪ Happy</li> <li>▪ Race</li> <li>▪ Black</li> <li>▪ Brown</li> <li>▪ Bisexual</li> <li>▪ Racist</li> <li>▪ Different</li> <li>▪ Disrespected</li> <li>▪ White people</li> <li>▪ Multiple ethnicities</li> <li>▪ Biggest big boy</li> <li>▪ Rock 'n' roll</li> <li>▪ Overweight</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family strength</li> <li>▪ Fear of the police</li> <li>▪ Family reunions</li> <li>▪ Thankful</li> <li>▪ Being taken care of</li> </ul>

## Post Story Circle Reflection: What touched you? Inspired you?

The Carr Center- Adult Dancers	Focus Hope	The Carr Center - Youth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Black body can move a crowd without moving!</li> <li>▪ Black body movement are powerful</li> <li>▪ The reflection that touched me the most was the traveling all over the world with her military family and her experience meeting other people of diverse cultures</li> <li>▪ Change was a trend. Healing - we use our bodies as a method of comfort. Gestures speak more loudly and faster than we ever could</li> <li>▪ I really enjoyed the story of black love in the hood form childhood.</li> <li>▪ Recognizing self in a familiar setting, Detroit. Last culture from places you would least expect.</li> <li>▪ Several stories were about being in both on all white situation to going to an all black situation. Most story tellers loved being around black people and were comfortable in their own skin.</li> <li>▪ Sharing culture - knowing we in the diaspora are the preserver of culture. We are the cultural evangelist and ambassadors of the world</li> <li>▪ Stand in line to see Obama</li> <li>▪ Look where you are going toward your future</li> <li>▪ Power. It was fascinating with the story of the dancer. How she told was to sexual in her movement, her walk. People can be afraid of the power of the majesty of the black woman walk.</li> <li>▪ You could hear children laughter all day long</li> <li>▪ I have mixed children and I want them to feel black love and pain</li> <li>▪ perception</li> <li>▪ Accept the things we cannot change: change the things we can know the difference</li> <li>▪ The world was a happy place</li> <li>▪ The world was a happy place, all homes had 2 parents, kids played together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Somebody else's story made me feel scared</li> <li>▪ How a 6-year-old had to learn about segregation at an early age</li> <li>▪ When a young girl felt proud about being identified with a race of a strong people</li> <li>▪ The kid that felt like killing herself. But change her mind. She's so young that the thought even entered her mind</li> <li>▪ Water fountain story</li> <li>▪ I loved my daddy story, it was so good even when he was 15 years old</li> <li>▪ Something that really changed me is when the story about when his family made fun of him because he played with dolls</li> <li>▪ Something that got to me was when Joseph because I use to fit in I still got bullied</li> <li>▪ Insisting on telling the truth despite adversary from your teacher. Hard to do with the power hierarchy in a classroom</li> <li>▪ Something that touched me from what she said, "When she tried to fit in with the others." I tried to do the same</li> <li>▪ When you were turned away from a job because of your color</li> <li>▪ When the young man felt different due to being bullied!!</li> <li>▪ Something that touched me was when the girl was getting less. What less was mean that in I got</li> <li>▪ When the story teller mentions she took money for meth and what touched me how today she wishes she could see her and apologize that showed her compassion.</li> <li>▪ What color am I? Mexican, White, and Black. Special v.s. couldn't use white fountain did not understand</li> <li>▪ I felt confident because of a story of hair and to not be afraid to be different</li> <li>▪ The part when Don said he was mixed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ My body is precious</li> <li>▪ My Mother said I wasn't like other boys, she told people, "he different"</li> <li>▪ Your Beauty is not defined by someone else</li> <li>▪ Your mother told me you're getting bigger.</li> <li>▪ Families have a lasting effect on life</li> <li>▪ The spirit of a nurturer</li> <li>▪ Am I supposed to be tink or thick? Who do I look like?</li> <li>▪ Seeing reflections of yourself in others in a positive way</li> <li>▪ I am that I am. My Body is beautiful regardless to how people see me from moment to moment. God Grant me <u>NEW</u> eyes to see me.</li> <li>▪ If we stay woke, we'll be wok.</li> <li>▪ Family words and actions hurts the most</li> <li>▪ Different</li> <li>▪ Be okay with who you were born to be not matter what definition society has. You are God's given GIFT</li> <li>▪ I realized that family perception can be really strong</li> <li>▪ I just like playing with the boys</li> <li>▪ Family can hurt unknowingly</li> <li>▪ Reflection: Find you. Take time to know who you are. Never let anyone define you</li> <li>▪ They said that I would be gay because I didn't play with dolls and they called me a boy</li> </ul>

At the end of the program each participant was asked to report the story that touched them the most. The following are responses from Bates Academy participants.

### Bates Academy\*

- When X played house with white people and they made her the maid because she was black
- What struck me was someone's story experienced that he/she last name was different from everyone else's last name in he/she house, when he/she walked home.
- Something that I learned is X is very different and her being different makes her very fun.
- It was funny when someone told the story about when they dressed up when we were supposed to be in uniform
- About being different or being disrespected
- 3rd story struck me because I could relate. She was the only one with her last name
- I was shocked when X said that a girl asked if she could use his finger as a black crayon
- Why is your skin like that and mine is different?
- X liked Rock music and didn't think about if anyone else cared
- X's story about how when his class mates drew him and how he had to ask his mom why they drew him with black and brown crayon
- I learned that there is no chicken flavored breast milk
- X mentioned that they were playing house and they made her the maid because she was black
- One story that was funny was X's.
- I never thought Costco will have racist people
- It was funny when a story was about getting colored in brown and black crayons
- She was the only black kid in preschool
- When the person went to her cousin house she was the only sled there, because of her cousins was home so she felt different
- The story I liked was when X was overweight, so his coach told him to play with the big bags, but he was bigger than it expressed your physical appearance could separate from others.
- Go sit with the big boys, X's story
- X said her grandmother said, "Thank God you like men" when she told her she was bisexual. It made me want to kill a certain person.
- X story was funny because he said he was black.
- X story - He was 10 years old listening to rock n roll and his mom came in and recorded him biggest big boy.
- X story was relatable because everyone had name brand shoes, but I didn't.
- The story I liked was when X went in the hot tub with white people and they got out the second she went in
- I liked X story about how the kids in his class colored him with black and brown crayons
- Hey, my name is X
- It was disrespectful when grandmother said thank God you like boys, but she's bisexual
- X's story being the only black kid and that racist thing asking to use her finger as her black crayon!
- What moved me is X's story which was very touching because of the challenges she faced because of her race.
- Being different is okay and you can't do anything about it!
- When you're the only black around a room full of whites, you can be treated poorly
- X's story - I was the biggest big boy
- I felt deeply for X having certain operations in life shouldn't separate you from the people who make you happy. Also, I understand Y's story, having multiple ethnicities is hard and causes confusion. But I admire the way he ignored all of the hate and discrimination
- I felt connected to a story because in my house, I also don't have the same name.
- I learned that people often fear and make fun of things that they don't understand. This leads to anger, sadness, or even more fear
- X related to me when I didn't have the good shoes everyone else had

\*Names were replaced with an "X" for anonymity

## How does my black body move through the world?

Winans Academy of Performing Arts		
I feel ...	My experience ...	I notice...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Happy (2 responses)</li><li>▪ Thankful</li><li>▪ uncomfortable</li><li>▪ Thankful</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ A good family</li><li>▪ With 2 parents</li><li>▪ My mami works for me. I have food, shelter and water</li><li>▪ I have clothes and get my hair done</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ how they trust me, are joyful, thankful. I am blessed</li><li>▪ How I have to respect my parents and I can do much more</li></ul>

### My story is...

"I remember a party in December at a hotel. The pool was cool. I pushed my sister in the pool. Then, the police came because somebody was selling weed. We hid under the bed. When the police left, us kids played hide and seek."

"I went to Tennessee in the summer. My mom said we were going to take a plane. I was scare. She said my grandma was taking the bus. I wanted to take the bus too. She said, I am taking you the airport, which then she walked me to the bus and said it was the bus. We drove a long time, through Ohio, then Kentucky. We stopped at a rest stop. We put music on like we were in New York and danced. People started giving us money. So we put a hat down, and they gave us more money. My mom wanted to take our money. We had lot of fun. There were lizards and my dad was catching them with a pan. The pool water was hot. It burnt my back. We made friends."

"I want my mixed children to know Black love."

"The pride of knowing I'm the representation of the beginning of the human race (based on scientific research and the oldest fossils is a woman's in Africa. Also, all colors of skin or people of any color stems from one gene of a black person. How wonderful everyone on the planet and you because a beautiful black woman ;). This body of the family is hold your head high. This came from Mom who said, 1) Did you kill someone, 2) Don't look down, and 3) Look where you are going and look forward to the future."

"As child I lived under the bridge in SW Detroit. Kids were playing. Activity all day long. You stay on the hill and big hole left over from construction. We knew everyone, cousins. It was a happy experience. Every house had a dad. The parents were play with the kids. They were play go carts. My father was artist and he wanted to move us. There was a complete shutdown. There 3 black kids in the new class. No double Dutch. There was no love. Now, I notice the Black love and other's love."

"Here [in the USA], I did not pay much attention about black. I belong to the D Girls Travel. When we traveled to Abu Dhabi, I noticed how I move as a black. They look for your gold. People would say, 'Buy this bag or other thing.' Even in plain clothes we stuck out. In Morocco people called out to us, "Obama Family". They associated me with the black Obama. They need to see us [black people] more."