

Diversity Statement

I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to a teenage mother and a drug dealing father. My father, wanting to do right by his kids, turned himself into prison and served his time. My mother had to raise me with little to no support. We bounced from relative to relative, homeless shelter to abusive grandmother, we both attempted to grow up without a solid foundation. I remember forcing myself to sleep early so that I could avoid hunger pains, and I could wake up and eat free lunches at school. I would sneak up for seconds at lunch to take extra food for dinner. I wore hand-me-downs for uniforms because we couldn't afford new clothes most of the time. My friends turned to selling drugs so they could get the new Jordan sneakers or the newest clothing from Lord knows where, they wanted me to join them, and I was tempted.

In seventh grade, a teacher heard me singing in detention and told me I should add choir to my classes. I thought it was a dumb idea, but I remembered that a lot of girls were in choir, so I joined. I loved singing, learning new songs in all different languages. In eighth grade my mom sent me to Milton Hershey School, a tuition-free boarding school for low-income children. From there I was asked to join the theatre department and my life was never the same. I discovered more choirs, plays, musicals, playwriting, that merged into a love of football, wrestling, track, mock trial, yearbook committee. I, for the first time in my life, saw opportunities available for me. With a full stomach, clean clothes, and a stable home, I was able to thrive as a student.

I tell this story because many BIPOC children have the same life I lived; except they are never found by that teacher. They aren't afforded the opportunities that all kids deserve to grow up to become their best selves. I believe it's my duty to provide chances, to make sure that these individuals are seen and heard. I started with the New Voices Play Festival and the Delaware

Young Playwrights Festival, both programs provided opportunities for public school children to write plays and have college students act them out on professional stages. To see them watch their works come to life, to know that they see more in themselves than they did before, it's a feeling I want all BIPOC kids to experience.

In addition to experience working with BIPOC children, I also bring to the classroom and studio a knowledge of intimacy work from Theatrical Intimacy Education, including Best Practices, Theatrical Studio Techniques, Casting, & Policy, and Foundations in Race for BIPOC artists that supports my commitment to consent-based, equitable practices for all. I believe it's important to protect minds and bodies as we explore pedagogical training. Oftentimes, we as BIPOC artists feel excluded in academic and professional spaces because those spaces aren't made for us. Our experiences aren't inherently "American" because we have been labeled and conditioned to believe we aren't. In Americanized spaces, our education tends to be as whitewashed as our history, so we feel misplaced and misunderstood when we are told that certain roles aren't for us or we are asked to "be blacker", "bring more blackness to the role", or the most baffling, "be more urban".

The best way to help combat the ignorance of an educational space grounded in a foundation of inequality is to actively be anti-racist. I have begun studying antiracist practices after attending Theatrical Intimacy Education's Foundations in Race for BIPOC artists. From there, I read Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be An Antiracist*, as well as many insightful articles in HowlRound, an "open platform for theatre makers worldwide that amplifies progressive, disruptive ideas about the art form and facilitates connection between diverse practitioners" (HowlRound n.p). I've interviewed and made coffee dates with people of different races and

sexual orientations so that I can get a deeper understanding of my own cultural blind spots. This is the energy and passion I want to bring into the classroom, to constantly educate others as well as myself in spaces of equality. Everyone deserves the chance to be their best selves, and I want to contribute everything that I can to make sure that happens.