The Running "Black Man": An Afro-Dystopian Praxis in Directing Jackie Sibblies Drury's *We Are Proud To Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as Southwest Africa, From the German Südwestafrika, Between the Years 1884–1915*

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If in the hey-dey of the greatest of the world's civilizations, it is possible for one people ruthlessly to steal another, drag them helpless across the water, enslave them, debauch them, and then slowly murder them by economic and social exclusion until they disappear from the face of the earth–if the consummation of such a crime be possible in the twentieth century, then our civilization is vain and the republic is a mockery and a farce.

—W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*.

Black Man: **All Others**:

I have been black all my life Running. Running. Run

I have been black all my life Running. Running. Run

…

All Others:

Running. Running. Run

Running. Running. Run

Running. Running. Run

Running. Running. Run

Excerpt from pg. 100-101 of Jackie Sibblies Drury's play *We Are Proud To Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as Southwest Africa, From the German Südwestafrika, Between the Years 1884–1915.*

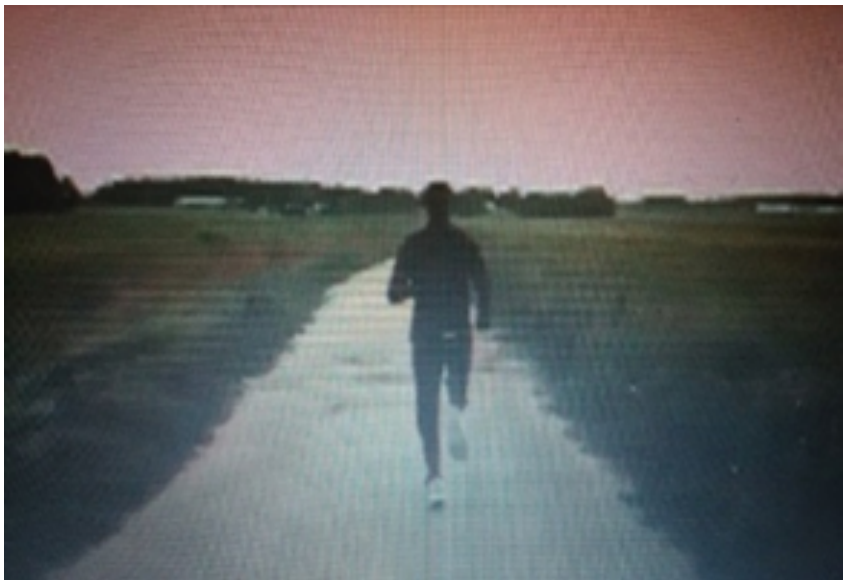

Figure 1, Film still taken from the virtual production by Zoom of Jackie Sibblies Drury's *We Are Proud To Present* showing a Black man running on a dirt road. Department of Theatre and Dance, California State University, Spring 2021 (photograph and digital media montage by the author).

Prelude: Contextual Background

I begin with W. E. B. Du Bois's statement in *The Philadelphia Negro*, originally published in 1899. Here, Du Bois recounts a global historiography of Black life in the African Diaspora with descendants of Indigenous Africans worldwide through the trans-Atlantic slave trade from Africa to the Americas and Europe. That Du Bois would call the mass trafficking of Africans a crime against humanity,[1] was haunting in 1899. However, as the United States was instituting "Jim Crow" laws in 1896[2] and the rise of lynching,[3] Germany was colonizing Namibia (formerly German Southwest Africa) from 1884 to 1915, subjugating the Herero and Namaqua peoples.[4] German settlers seized Herero and Namaqua land, cattle, water, and resources; and by 1904, Herero leader Samuel Maharero and Namaqua leader, Hendrik Witbooi rebelled against German colonizers in the Battle of Waterburg, a series of wars called the

[1] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 269.

[2] "Plessy v. Ferguson," Legal Information Institute, Cornell University, accessed May 25, 2022. https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/163/537.

[3] Koritha Mitchell, "Black-Authored Lynching Drama's Challenge to Theater History," in *Black Performance Theory*, eds. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 87. Koritha Mitchell defines lynching as "political terrorism," and as "a distinctly post-emancipation phenomenon." Lynching includes not only hanging, but mutilation, dismemberment, and burning of a Black person on a pyre.

[4] The Herero (Ovaherero) is a Bantu ethnic group in Southern Africa, and the Namaqua is the largest group of the Khoikhoi people.

German-Herero War from 1904 to1908.[5] In response, General Lothar von Trotha issued a chilling extermination order on October 2, 1904, targeting the Herero and Namaqua:

> The Herero [and Namaqua] are no longer German subjects. They have murdered and stolen. ... I say to the people ... the people of the Herero must ... leave the country. If they do not, I will force them to do so with the Groot Rohr [big cannon]. Within the German borders [of Southwest Africa] any Herero with or without rifle, with or without cattle, will be shot, I will no longer shelter women or children. I will force them back to their people or let them be shot.[6]

Those who fled to the Omaheke desert died of thirst and starvation, particularly after the Germans poisoned the wells.[7] Those who survived were imprisoned in concentration camps, dying of disease and exhaustion.[8]

By the end of the German-Herero War in 1908, 80% of the Herero people, and 50% of the Namaqua people perished.[9] Considered a forgotten or little-known genocide by western standards, the extermination of the Herero and Namaqua peoples is the first genocide of the twentieth century, about forty years before the legal term was in use.[10] In Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Office of the United Nations Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) (1948), genocide is defined as:

> Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or

[5] Ewelina U. Ochab, "Germany Recognizes The Atrocities Against The Herero and Nama People As Genocide and Offers Assistance," *Forbes*, May 28, 2021, https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2021/05/28/germany-recognizes-the-atrocities-against-the-herero-and-nama-people-as-genocide-and-offers-assistance/?sh=1b51d72d78ed.

[6] Lars Müeller, "'We need to get away from a culture of denial?': The German-Herero War in Politics and Textbooks," *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 5, No. 1 (2013): 53.

[7] "The Herero and Namaqua Genocide," *The Holocaust Explained – The Weiner Holocaust Library*, accessed May 28, 2022, https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/what-was-the-holocaust/what-was-genocide/the-herero-and-namaqua-genocide/.

[8] Ochab, "Germany Recognizes The Atrocities."

[9] Ochab, "Germany Recognizes The Atrocities."

[10] "Genocide," coined by Raphaël Lemkin in 1944 means "people killing" or "killing a group of people," derived from the Latin suffix *caedo*, which means "killing," and combined with the Greek word *genos* for "group of people." Raphaël Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government Proposals for Redress*, (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), xi.

> in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.[11]

Since 1946, and especially now with the legal definition of "genocide" as a crime against humanity, the Herero and Namaqua have been seeking justice through international courts in the United States.[12]

In one of the many attempts since 2015 to seek justice, a delegation of the descendants of the Herero and Namaqua traveled to New York City in January 2017 to petition the international court under the Alien Tort Statute, which allows non-US citizens to make claims before the US Federal Court for international law violations.[13] Plaintiffs included Vekuii Rukoro, Chief of the Herero people, and David Frederick, Chief and Chairman of the Nama Traditional Authorities Association (NTAA), and the Association of the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Genocide in the USA, Inc.[14] Germany had refused to attend these hearings, let alone acknowledge their crimes as a genocide against the Herero and Namaqua.[15]

However, on May 28, 2021, after an intense five-year negotiation, and well over a hundred years later, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas finally announced that Germany will formally acknowledge the killing of the Herero and Namaqua peoples as a "genocide," pledging $1.3 billion dollars in development projects with an apology. Despite Germany's attempt at redress, Herero activist Laidlaw Peringanda, Chairman of the Namibian Genocide Association (NGA), says that an apology and money are not nearly enough for Germany's atrocities.[16] Sarah Olutola shows a direct link with anti-Blackness, colonialism, and the genocide of the Herero and Namaqua with police brutality in the United States.[17] Olutola contends that the genocide against

[11] "Office of the UN Special Adviser on The Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) – Analysis Framework," accessed May 28, 2022, https://www.un.org/ar/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/osapg_analysis_framework.pdf.

[12] Regina Menachery Paulose and Ronald Gordon Rogo, "Addressing Colonial Crimes Through Reparations: The Mau Mau, Herero and Nama," *State Crime Journal* 7, no. 2 (2018): 369.

[13] Eddy Portnoy, "Descendants of Namibia Genocide Victims Seek Reparations in New York," *The Guardian*, accessed May 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/16/namibia-genocide-reparations-case-germany-new-york.

[14] Portnoy, "Descendants of Namibia Genocide."

[15] Portnoy, "Descendants of Namibia Genocide."

[16] "Germany Officially Recognizes Colonial-Era Namibia Genocide," *BBC News*, May 28, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57279008.

[17] Sarah Olutola, "The History of Racist Colonial Violence Can Help Us Understand Police Violence: Colonialism Defined Blackness as Inferiority," *The Washington Post*, last modified September 1, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/09/01/history-racist-colonial-violence-can-help-us-understand-police-violence/.

the Herero and Namaqua demonstrates how colonialism and racism can ignite and fuel racial violence, and have been used in case studies to explain a history of racial violence globally.[18]

European colonialism since the fifteenth century is defined as the political control of one country over another country by occupying it with settlers, including cultural and economic exploitation. Robbie W.C. Tourse, Johnnie Hamilton-Mason, and Nancy J. Wewiorski define racism in a colonial context as a social construct that is "dynamic, multidimensional, and complex."[19] Tourse, Hamilton-Mason, and Wewiorski theorize two types of racism: "dominative or *old fashioned racism*" and "cultural racism."[20] Dominative or *old fashioned* racism is "the overt misuse of power, exploitation, and extermination of subordinate groups,"[21] whereas cultural racism is the belief that white culture is the standard and norm, and that "other"[22] cultures have deficits, used to justify covert and overt violence against them.[23] Jackie Sibblies Drury's *We Are Proud To Present* features themes on colonialism, racism, racial epithets, and the genocide of the Herero and Namaqua peoples, interconnected with racial violence and lynching in the United States that speaks to the urgency in dealing with anti-Blackness in Africa and the African Diaspora.

Biography: Jackie Sibblies Drury

Award-winning African American playwright Jackie Sibblies Drury received numerous prestigious awards, including the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for the play, *Fairview*, an incisive critique about race and surveillance.[24] Born and raised in Plainfield, New Jersey by her Jamaican mother and grandmother,[25] Drury is among a cadre of African American playwrights who focus primarily on race in US American culture and society in dramatic literature and plays, including, Antoinette Nwandu, Jordon E. Cooper, and Jeremy O. Harris.[26] Drury's plays are about race in US American life, presented as satirical comedies or dramedies, including, *Social Creatures* (2013), *We Are Proud To Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as Southwest Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915* (2014), *Really* (2016), and *Marys Seacole* (2019). *We Are Proud To Present* had its

[18] Olutola, "The History of Racist Colonial Violence Can Help Us Understand Police."
[19] Robbie W.C. Tourse, Johnnie Hamilton-Mason, and Nancy J. Wewiorski, *Systemic Racism in the United States: Scaffolding as Social Construction* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018), 9.
[20] Tourse, Hamilton-Mason, and Wewiorski, "Systemic Racism," 5.
[21] Tourse, Hamilton-Mason, and Wewiorski, "Systemic Racism," 5.
[22] Tourse, Hamilton-Mason, and Wewiorski, "Systemic Racism," 5.
[23] Tourse, Hamilton-Mason, and Wewiorski, "Systemic Racism," 5.
[24] "Fairview," *The Pulitzer Prizes*, accessed May 30, 2022, https://www.pulitzer.org/event/fairview.
[25] Lawrence Goodman, "The Monstrous Unknown," *Brown Alumni Magazine*, July 2, 2013, https://www.brownalumnimagazine.com/articles/2013-07-02/the-monstrous-unknown.
[26] Michael Paulson and Nicole Herrington, "How These Black Playwrights are Challenging American Theatre," *New York Times*," April 25, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/25/theater/black-playwrights-theater.html.

world premiere at the Victory Gardens Theatre, Chicago, Illinois in 2012. The play was previously developed at the Magic Theater's Virgin Play Reading Series at the Bay Area Playwrighting Festival/San Francisco, and the Victory Garden Theatre Ignition Festival. *We Are Proud To Present* was on the New York Magazine's top ten picks of plays in 2012; and had its European premiere at the Bush Theatre in London, England in 2014. *We Are Proud To Present* was later published in 2014.

Introduction

Judging from the title alone, one would assume that *We Are Proud To Present* is about the genocide of the Herero and Namaqua; however, the play is anything but. Theatre critic Charles Isherwood from *The New York Times* quips that:

> …the show's handful of a title is exhausting itself. In full: 'We Are Proud To Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as Southwest Africa, From the German Südwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915.' (Actors aren't copy editors: 'to present a presentation,' really?).[27]

Drury's sarcastically long title is a satire on the characters who think they know everything about the Herero and Namaqua but know nothing at all; and that they would be so "proud to present" a genocide, giddy with excitement. Drury's sarcasm is on the characters' inability to present a history of the genocide in Africa without seriously examining their racial biases.

The play is not a documentary about the Herero and Namaqua genocide. It is not a docu-drama like Anna Deavere Smith's plays, *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities* (1993) and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (1994) that archive histories of racial uprisings in the United States through verbatim interviews. Drury's *We Are Proud To Present* resembles Suzan-Lori Parks's *Venus* (1997) about the life and death of early nineteenth century Khoikhoi[28] woman, Saartijie Baartman, in European freak shows in a spectacular theatrical retelling.

We Are Proud To Present is a satirical dramedy, set in the United States in the early twenty-first century in a rehearsal room, possibly in New York City.[29] A satirical dramedy uses satire, humor, and irony to make fun of political vices and institutions. Satires not only entertain

[27] Charles Isherwood, "Theatre Review: Acting Out a Blood Bath Brings Dangers of Its Own," *The New York Times*, November 16, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/17/theater/reviews/we-are-proud-to-present-a-presentation-at-soho-rep.html.

[28] The Khoikhoi people are an African ethnic group indigenous to Southern Africa. Namaqua people are the largest group of the Khoikhoi.

[29] The 2014 production at the Bush Theatre, London was set in London, but with white and Black British characters with one character, "Another White Man" having family connections in the United States.

but go beyond to reconsider gaps and erasures of knowledge and histories. The play's themes include difficult conversations and heated debates about genocide, racial prejudice, antisemitism, anti-Blackness, racial epithets, Jim Crow-era racism, and lynching imagery – all in slapstick. The play then turns grim when the character, "Black Man" exposes the erasure of Africans and the Black experience in their devised play. The ensemble mocks, and then attacks the character, "Black Man" who escapes from being lynched in the scene for speaking out about the lack of African representation. Like Olutola, Drury directly connects the genocide of the Herero and Namaqua with racial violence in the United States through carefully crafted dialogues.[30]

In addition to being a satirical dramedy, *We Are Proud To Present* is a contemporary lynching drama, a genre in African American theatre with references to lynching and lynching symbols. Judith L. Stephens defines a lynching drama as "a play in which the threat or occurrence of a lynching, past or present, has major impact on the dramatic action."[31] *We Are Proud To Present* follows a lineage of lynching dramas with references to lynching in William Wells Brown's *The Escape* (1858)[32] to contemporary plays such as Dominque Morriseau's *Blood at the Root* that premiered in 2014, and published in 2017, about the Jena Six, who were six Black teenagers from Jena, Mississippi threatened by nooses in a tree.[33] Black and white playwrights have written lynching dramas with sustained attention from Black women playwrights[34] like Angelina Weld Grimké, the first Black woman playwright of a lynching drama for the play, *Rachel* (1916). Other lynching dramas include Georgia Douglas Johnson's *Blue-Eyed Black Boy* (1930), Evelyn Keller Caldwell's *Voice in the Wilderness* (1944), Alice Childress's *Trouble in Mind* (1955), Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964), and Sandra Seaton's *The Bridge Party* (1989). Lynching in *We Are Proud To Present* connects with the genocide of the Herero and Namaqua with issues of racial violence in the United States, and global anti-Blackness.

This paper is a creative exploration in directing a Spring 2021 virtual production of *We Are Proud To Present* on Zoom at California State University, Sacramento during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a racial reckoning after the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25, 2020. The actor playing "Black Man" did not want to be chased by a "lynch mob," especially after being retraumatized by recent events. I created a digital media[35] montage of a

[30] Olutola, "The History of Racist Colonial Violence."

[31] Judith L. Stephens, "Lynching Dramas and Women: History and Critical Contexts," in *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women*, eds. Kathy A. Perkins and Judith L. Stephens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 3.

[32] Stephens, "Lynching Dramas and Women: History and Critical Contexts," 4.

[33] Morriseau's play's title, *Blood at the Root* is from the song, "Strange Fruit" (1939), written by Abel Meeropol, a Jewish high school teacher from the Bronx, New York City, and performed by jazz icon, Billie Holiday in 1939 with lyrics, "Southern trees bear strange fruit/ Blood on the leaves and blood on the root." Billie Holiday, "Strange Fruit," accessed May 28, 2022, https://billieholiday.com/signaturesong/strange-fruit/.

[34] Stephens, "Lynching Dramas and Women: History and Critical Contexts," 3.

[35] Digital media refer to audio, video, and photo content, encoded for use on electronic devices. I

running "Black Man", as a surrogate for the physical embodiment of "Black Man" in an Afro-dystopia, defined as a spiraling totalitarian world of racial injustice. Afro-dystopia emerges from Afrofuturism, a term coined by Mark Dery in 1994 (but practiced long before it was coined), consisting of any combination of African mythology, African Diaspora, technologies, science fiction and artistic practices. Afrofuturist Ytasha Womack theorizes that Afrofuturism is at the "intersection of imagination, technology, the future and liberation,"[36] Deji Bryce Olukotun explains that Afrofuturism is divided between Afro-dystopia and Afro-utopia.[37] Afro-dystopia in Afrofuturism is bleak and dark, whereas Afro-utopia portrays a so-called hopeful future.[38]

An Afro-dystopia is a shadowy world that critiques and/or warns of an autocratic racial world with disastrous outcomes including being stuck in a time warp that keeps repeating racial injustices in cycles.[39] The running "Black Man" in the play, for instance, is constantly running from racial violence. In the Afro-dystopian world of *We Are Proud to Present,* Drury shows a cycle of racial violence on Black bodies in the genocide in Africa with the historical lynching in the United States, and by theatrical proxy, a running "Black Man", as timeless. An Afro-dystopian praxis is a process of disrupting representations of racial violence in the play through a digital media montage of historical and contemporary images and film. Drury's Afro-dystopian vision simultaneously historicizes and futurizes the plight of the character, "Black Man" running across time, space, and geography - that critiques the republic, as Du Bois puts it, a "mockery and a farce."[40]

I argue that an Afro-dystopian praxis confronts the legacies of genocide in Africa and lynching in the United States in the virtual production of *We Are Proud To Present* on Zoom using a digital media montage of images and voiceovers to represent the running "Black Man" character. Using a digital media montage of a running Black man protected the actor from being retraumatized from physically engaging in a lynch mob and noose in the scene during a tumultuous time of a racial reckoning and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021. My Afro-dystopian praxis in directing *We Are Proud To Present* was a digital media montage as a surrogate for the actor playing "Black Man" who did not want to be chased by the lynch mob nor to handle a noose in the Spring 2021 virtual production.

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used digital platforms with images with JPEG, film with MP4 and AVI, and audio files with WAV in cultural and political activist montages.

[36] Ytasha Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2013), 9.

[37] Deji Bryce Olukotun, "Utopian and Dystopian Visions of Afrofuturism," *Slate*, last modified November 30, 2015, https://slate.com/technology/2015/11/utopian-and-dystopian-visions-of-afrofuturism.html.

[38] Olukotun, "Utopian and Dystopian Visions of Afrofuturism."

[39] Olukotun, "Utopian and Dystopian Visions of Afrofuturism."

[40] Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, 269.

The digital media montage titled, "Oooh, I am terrified!" used in the virtual production of *We Are Proud To Present* incorporated images and depictions from the German-Herero war; the genocide of the Herero and Namaqua people; US southern cotton plantations; US American Civil War; Ku Klux Klan; lynching in the US; an image of a noose; images of the killing of George Floyd; and Black Lives Matter protests. The cast recorded voiceovers from the script of "Black Man" being chased with chants from a lynch mob using racist jokes and epithets as written in the play text. I focused on the running "Black Man" character who repeats the lines, "I have been black all my life, I have been black all my life,"[41] in a universal chant across time and space geography from Africa to the African Diaspora in the play. I deployed digital media for creative research, disseminating the challenges of representing the "Black Man" running to a terrifying end in place of a lynching spectacle on Zoom. Ahmaud Arbery's jogging through a white neighborhood only to be killed by vigilantes for jogging while Black[42] was not lost in the play's image of the running "Black Man" who is interconnected with the Herero and Namaqua people running away from German soldiers as they were being shot to death during the genocide.[43]

First, I will discuss the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial reckoning of 2020-2021, and how I came to direct a virtual production of *We Are Proud to Present*. Second, I will provide a detailed synopsis of the play without conjecture to show key moments and transitions. Then, I will analyze selected scenes in the play with overarching themes leading to the attack on the character, "Black Man". Finally, I will discuss the digital media montage, "Oooh, I am terrified!" shown in place of "Black Man's" physical contact with the noose prop and being chased and taunted in the final scene of the play, followed by my conclusions on an Afro-dystopian praxis in creating a digital media montage in place of "Black Man's" embodiment of racial trauma in the play.

COVID-19 and Racial Reckoning

When COVID-19 hit the United States in January 2020 to the pandemic in March 2020, record numbers of Black, Indigenous and Brown people were most affected, dying from the disease. Public health officials were overwhelmed by the comorbidities and underlying conditions among Black and Indigenous communities leading to hospitalizations and deaths. COVID-19 had uncovered a conglomerate of disparities exposing the generational economic wealth gaps, and access to health care, showing just how insidious the effects of racism have

[41] Jackie Sibblies Drury, *We Are Proud To Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as Southwest Africa, From the German Südwestafrika, Between the Years 1884–1915* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), 100-101.

[42] Elliot C. McLaughlin and Devon M. Sayers, "Guilty Verdicts in the trial of Ahmaud Arbery's killers met with relief and joy in Georgia and beyond," *CNN*, last modified November 24, 2021, https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/24/us/ahmaud-arbery-killing-trial-wednesday-jury-deliberations/index.html.

[43] Ochab, "Germany Recognizes The Atrocities."

been. By Memorial Day on May 25, 2020, a Black man, George Floyd was killed by a police officer who knelt on his neck until he expired in Minneapolis, Minnesota, igniting weeks of national and global protests calling for an end to white supremacy and racism.[44] Many saw the killing of George Floyd as a lynching of a Black man, filmed by then Black teenager, Darnella Frazier who posted the video on social media, seen around the world.[45] Over twenty-six million protestors took to the streets worldwide, toppling colonial and confederate monuments and statues of racial autocrats.[46] Many called for policing reform in the United States in the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, of 2021, yet to be passed into law.[47]

A week after the killing of George Floyd, several institutions across the country posted statements of solidarity, pledges to end racism, and served various diversity initiatives to change the culture of anti-Black violence. A collective of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) theatremakers published a testimonial letter online denouncing anti-Blackness and racism in white American theatre, followed by living documents of principles, tenets, and demands for change from antiracist pedagogies, theatre in higher education, productions, and season selections, to antibias training in hiring practices in predominantly white university theatre, dance, and film departments.[48]

Usually, university theatre departments would select productions for the upcoming academic year with that year's season planning meeting. In March 2020, the department scheduled a season planning meeting for one of the first Zoom meetings after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. I proposed directing *We Are Proud To Present* for its issues around racism, genocide, colonialism, anti-Blackness in Africa and the African Diaspora. By the killing of George Floyd in May 2020, it became clear why Drury's *We Are Proud To Present* was relevant for the time.

Before then, the play was always relevant because of Herero and Namaqua activists' tireless activism for an acknowledgment of the crime of genocide. When the play was first produced in 2012, the Herero and Namibian peoples who were in litigation with Germany demanded the return of twenty skulls after the genocide in 1904.[49] Representatives from the Herero and Namaqua peoples traveled to Germany in 2011 to retrieve skulls from the genocide

[44] Evan Hill, et. al., "How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody." *The New York Times*, last modified January 24, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html?module=inline.

[45] Rachel Treisman, "Darnella Frazier, Teen Who Filmed Floyd's Murder, Praised for Making Verdict Possible," April 21, 2021, *NPR*, https://www.npr.org/sections/trial-over-killing-of-george-floyd/2021/04/21/989480867/darnella-frazier-teen-who-filmed-floyds-murder-praised-for-making-verdict-possib.

[46] Treisman, "Darnella Frazier."

[47] "H.R. 1280 – George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021," *117th Congress (2021-2022),* accessed February 8, 2023, https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1280.

[48] "We See You, White American Theater," accessed May 28, 2022, https://www.weseeyouwat.com/statement.

[49] Paulose and Rogo, "Addressing Colonial Crimes Through Reparations," 369-388.

that were used in twentieth-century scientific racism studies to prove European superiority over Africans.[50] In addition, the play's 2012 production and publication in 2014, coincided with the emergence of Black Lives Matter founded in the United States in July 2013 by Black queer women activists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi upon the acquittal of George Zimmerman for killing a Black teenager, Trayvon Martin on February 26, 2012.[51] Drury's play tackled anti-Blackness in a far-reaching scope in Africa and the African Diaspora.

Little did I know how these events would shape my directing of *We Are Proud To Present* with themes of anti-Blackness in the US with direct connections in the genocide of the Herero and Namaqua through a motif of the running "Black Man" character. As the university grappled with weekly antiracist meetings, I directed the play by Zoom, during the COVID-19 pandemic, using socially distanced protocols, as a global racial reckoning ensued. The university provided counseling services in general and throughout the rehearsal process. In addition, the entire department attended weekly in-house antiracism meetings and word-smithing statements with recommitments to social justice.

Synopsis: *We Are Proud to Present*

We Are Proud To Present consists of six actors, all nameless, generically listed in order as "Actor 6/Black Woman," "Actor 1/White Man," "Actor 2/Black Man," "Actor 3/Another White Man," "Actor 4/Another Black Man," and "Actor 5/White Woman."[52] The play begins with the characters' enthusiastic overview of German colonization of Southwest Africa, the Herero and Namaqua people, the German-Herero War, and the events leading to the genocide to the end of German colonization in 1915. They end the prologue by reciting the long title as quoted in the play text: "We Are Proud To Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South-West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884 and 1915."[53] Led by "Actor 6/Black Woman," the actors role-play and devise scenes from letters written by German soldiers to their wives and families in Germany with details from German and Herero wars.[54] The group thumbs through boxes of letters they borrowed from the public library as they try to figure out how to devise a play from the letters.[55] Each letter begins with "Dear," and a German name they cannot pronounce. The character "Black Woman" tells them to use the name "Sarah" for every white woman as in "Dear Sarah."[56]

[50] Paulose and Rogo, "Addressing Colonial Crimes Through Reparations,"369-388.
[51] "Black Lives Matter," accessed May 28, 2022, https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/.
[52] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 4.
[53] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 16.
[54] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 20.
[55] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 20.
[56] Drury, *We are Proud To Present*, 21.

Only "Actor 5/White Woman" is named "Sarah" with reference to genocidal history in Germany. In 1939 at the beginning of the World War II, Germany issued the order that all German Jewish women should called "Sarah," and all German Jewish men should be called "Israel."[57] However, it is understood that "White Woman" is a German woman, not a German Jewish woman in the play. The characters agree to use the name "Sarah" in ignorance, and because they cannot pronounce the German names in the letters. Drury uses the name "Sarah" as a theatrical device with letters hauntingly addressed to "Dear Sarah" to expose Germany's genocidal histories. What follows are short scenes with slapstick humor. The first devised scene is "White Woman" who decides to play a German woman, "Sarah" but struggles to find the character. "White Man" plays a young German soldier as he is writing a letter to his wife, Sarah, describing his travels to this "unfamiliar" place in Southwest Africa.[58] "Black Man" then plays a "Herero tribesman" introducing himself and his cattle.

Then, "White Woman" finds her character who, in a comedic stereotypical German accent, talks about her two boys, Heiner and Leipzig, and that she misses her husband so far away in German Southwest Africa. The ensemble then breaks into beatbox when "White Woman" raps a love song to husband in German Southwest Africa to the tune of the German song, *Edelweiss.* The beatbox continues as "White Man" raps his letter with "Dear Sarah." Up to this point, *"*White Man" and "White Woman" (as Sarah) have dominated the rehearsal room with only improvisations about the Germans and Germany.

Finally, "Black Man" who had remained quiet during this time asks, "Are we just going to sit here and watch some white people fall in love all day?"[59] The Black characters, especially "Black Man" begin to question the exclusion of Black people, and Africans in German Southwest Africa. The play then takes a dark turn with more heated debates about Black erasures and the lack of representations of Africans. The ensemble now openly derides "Black Man" and "Black Woman" for speaking out. First, the group mocks "Black Man" by devising a scene about Africa as "wild," joined by "Another Black Man" who plays a stereotypical African saying in the scene, "I hunt de lion. I hunt de jagua. I hunt de tiegah."[60] Then "Black Man" interrupts the scene to chastise "Another Black Man" for the African stereotype, and that Another Black Man should know better because he is Black. "Another Black Man" responds in his defense that "we have to start somewhere" in devising a play about the genocide. Black Man says, "so start by being black," in defense of other Black people.[61]

[57] Eddy Portnoy, "All German Jews Forced to change names to Israel and Sarah," *The Forward,"* August 17, 2013, https://forward.com/news/182465/all-german-jews-forced-to-change-names-to-israel-a/.

[58] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 24.

[59] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 48.

[60] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 48.

[61] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 48.

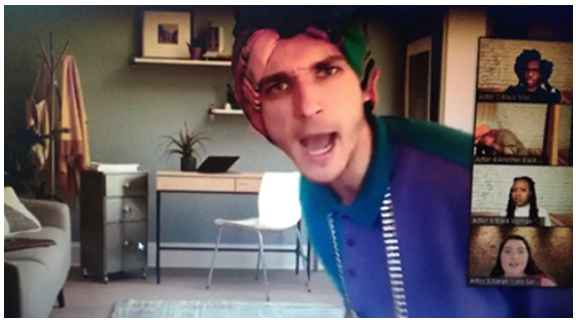

Figure 2**,** Film stills from the virtual Spring 2021 production of *We Are Proud To Present* by Jackie Sibblies Drury. Phoenix Brewer is featured here as "Another White Man," stereotypically playing as "Black Woman's" grandmother, featured in blue with a head wrap. On the right panel from the top are Derek Bell as "Black Man", J.J. Jones as "Another Black Man", Brittanie Banks as "Black Woman", and Hannah Meddler as "White Woman/Sarah". Directed by D. A-R. Forbes-Erickson (author), Department of Theatre and Dance, California State University, Sacramento, (photographs by the author).[62]

Next, "Black Woman" tries to refocus the group by sharing her inspiration for devising this play about the Herero and Namaqua genocide. "Black Woman" explains that she saw a picture of a Herero woman in a magazine who looked like her family, and her grandmother. She read about the genocide in Namibia, and felt a connection with the Herero woman in the picture. Again, "Another White Man" mocks "Black Woman" by playing her Black grandmother in a stereotypical Black US southern accent: "Ooooh chil'. Talk to me, girl"[63] in Figure 2 showing a film still from the virtual production on Zoom. "Another Black Man" follows in this derision by playing "Black Woman's" father. Both use a stereotypical African American southern accent in an all-out slapstick of the grandmother accusing her son of stealing the cake in the kitchen. "Black Man" responds, "That's not how black people talk."[64] The following scenes become more and more intense with racial violence and epithets when "Black Man" pushes for inclusion of the Black experience and to discuss the genocide of the Herero and Namaqua peoples. "White

[62] Full cast included: Derek Bell, Brittanie Banks, Cecilia Juarez, Greg Kubik Boyd, J.J. Jones, Hannah Meddler, and Phoenix Brewer. In the virtual production, we included Cecilia Juarez as a seventh actor as per departmental requirements for a minimum of seven actors per production. Sincere thanks and appreciation for the cast, crew, and production team in the Department of Theatre and Dance, California State University, Sacramento.

[63] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 50.

[64] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 51.

Man" responds with questions about whether a genocide in German Southwest Africa ever even occurred like the Jewish Holocaust with antisemitic sentiments to compare German atrocities.[65]

To include Black representations, "Black Man" and "Black Woman" devise a love scene for a Herero man and woman to counter the earlier love scene between a German soldier and his wife, Sarah. Then, the ensemble argues about who has been to Germany and is better positioned to represent Germany in the play. "White Man" argues with "Black Man" about representing Africa when none of them have ever been to Africa, and not qualified to include a Black experience.

> **Black Man**: Yeah, and I don't need to go to Africa to know what it's like to be black.
> **White Man**: You're not supposed to be black, you're supposed to be African.
> **Black Man**: There's no difference between being black and being African / Africa is black.[66]

From here, the ensemble reenacts the extermination order by General Lothar von Trotha, with the group now forced into a concentration camp with enslaved Herero and Namaqua in hard labor building the railroad. "Black Man" who is now playing a Herero Man decides to stop working on the railroad and begins to leave. A German soldier played by "White Man" holds his fingers like a gun on "Black Man."

After a brief altercation, the German soldier pretend-shoots the Herero Man. As the Herero Man is falling to the ground, the German soldier continues shooting as he reads a letter to his wife, "Dear Sarah." The ensemble is shocked at the barbarity of "White Man" as a German soldier as he is reading a letter to his wife and shooting a Herero Man, played by "Black Man."

"Another White Man" consoles "White Man" who is now feeling guilty for pretend-shooting a Herero man. "Another White Man" tells a story about his great-grandfather, a Union soldier in the American Civil War who shot a Black Union soldier in front of Confederate soldiers for protection. "Black Man" and the white characters then argue about the ethics of killing a Herero man during the genocide, and a Black Union soldier during the US American Civil War. This is where the ensemble seems to turn against "Black Man." After an appeal by "Black Woman" to refocus their attention to the genocide in Africa, the ensemble begins the final scenes with a rounding up of the Herero and Namaqua to be sent to the concentration camp. This scene morphs into a "slave" plantation in the US American South with "work song" and "slave song."[67] The characters' accents change to nineteenth century US southern drawl with "White Man" as an overseer, and the Black characters as enslaved Africans on a plantation.

[65] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 59.
[66] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 70.
[67] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 94.

Then "Black Man" breaks free saying "I don't belong here," and begins leaving. The white characters try to stop "Black Man" from leaving escalating with racial taunts and threats. From here, the white characters begin to act like a historical lynch mob, surrounding "Black Man", hurling threats of racial violence, racist epithets, antisemitism, anti-Blackness, and taunts. "If you throw a nigger/ And a jew/ Off a roof/ Which one is going to land first?/ the nigger lands first/ Because shit falls faster than ashes."[68] In horror, "Black Man" tries to escape and runs away as "White Man" shows a noose. The mob captures "Black Man" and throws a noose over a beam on stage as if to hang him. They put the noose over "Black Man's" head and neck. "Black Man" struggles, calling out for help. "Help me. Seriously. Help me. Get this fucking thing off me."[69] "Black Man" frantically takes the noose from his neck and exits the stage, followed by "Black Woman" who had lost control of the situation. The remaining ensemble is shocked at what just happened. They stare in silence until one by one, they begin to cry, laugh, and eventually end with loud screams as they exit the stage. "Another Black Man" is left on stage staring in silence. He then pulls down the noose and packs up the letters and props. He turns to the audience to say something, but words fail him. He is speechless.

Analysis: *We Are Proud To Present*

What should have been a devised play about the Herero genocide turns into a historical lynching event targeting the character, "Black Man." "You better run, nigger. I said run. Run, nigger,"[70] shouts the other characters to "Black Man" that soon become rhythmic chants of "I have been black all my life,"[71] to "running, running, run"[72] illustrated in the epigraph. "Black Man" runs away from being nearly lynched by the actors role-playing the legacies of racial terror, gone awry, describing an Afro-dystopia for "Black Man." In theorizing the Black body in performance, Harvey Young states that the Black body, dismembered and mutilated, would be "souvenirs" for white consumption, and photographed for postcards,[73] and argues that "the lynching body is a spectacular performance remain or, more accurately, a remain of a performance spectacle."[74] Similarly, Trudier Harris notes that white mobs would "divide the [Black] body into trophies."[75] Philip C. Kolin concurs that the lynching spectacle functions to

[68] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 100.
[69] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 101
[70] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 96.
[71] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 96.
[72] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 96.
[73] Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and The Black Body* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), 170
[74] Young, *Embodying Black Experience*, 167.
[75] Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 6.

terrorize Black folx, repeatedly so that they will see and know to cower into submission, much like the re-play of extrajudicial killings of Black people in US media.[76]

Koritha Mitchell points out that African American activists and artists like Drury have historically addressed what she calls "'the theatre/lynching alliance' – the way that mobs relied on theatricality and the mainstream stage relied on the mob's themes, characters, and symbols."[77] In the final scene of the play, Drury shows the lynching hysteria interrelated with the horrors of genocide in the "theatre/lynching alliance"[78] in the way that the howling chanting builds in the lynching event. Drury shows how the characters in *We Are Proud To Present* appear to be acting out an embodied memory, or muscle-memory described in the racial terror and hysteria. The racial hysteria in historical lynchings explains how the characters in *We Are Proud To Present* seem to be in "auto-pilot" as they taunt and chase the "Black Man" in the final scene. The characters never actually get to "presenting the presentation" of the genocide against the Herero and Namaqua, but it is clear that by the end of the play that characters are beginning to understand what happened to the Herero and Namaqua through a history of racial violence and lynching in United States.

Charles McNulty of the *Los Angeles Times* remarks that in the play:

> …a black actor, ['Black Man'], asks, 'Are we just going to sit here and watch some white people fall in love all day?' … 'Where are all the Africans?' he demands to know. His fear is that in concentrating on the German experience the company will inadvertently erase the experience of the Herero."[79]

"Black Man" exposes the erasure of Black experience in Africa and the African Diaspora writ large:

> **Actor 1[White Man**]: We're just reading the letters. I'm sure we'll find something that has some context.
> **Actor 2 [Black Man**]: I think we should see some Africans in Africa.
> **Actor 1 [White Man**]: And I think we have to stick with what we have access to.
> **Actor 2 [Black Man**]: No no no. This is some *Out-of-Africa-African-Queen*-bullshit you all are pulling right here, ok? If we are in Africa. I want to see some black

[76] Philip C. Kolin, "American History/American Nightmare," in *Contemporary African American Women Playwrights*, ed. Philip C. Kolin, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 66.
[77] Mitchell, "Black-Authored Lynching," 98.
[78] Mitchell, "Black-Authored Lynching," 98.
[79] Charles McNulty, "Theatre Review: 'We Are Proud to Present' and a Time of Genocide," *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2013, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-xpm-2013-jun-11-la-et-cm-we-are-proud-to-present-review-20130612-story.html.

people.[80]

The characters engage in heated debates about who has been to Germany as tensions run high. "Another White Man" claims that he has been to Germany. "Black Man" retorts that he has been to Germany too. Later, when "Black Man" insists the group includes representations of Black people in Africa, an annoyed "White Man" questions if "Black Man" has ever been to Africa. "Black Man" says that you do not need to go to Africa to be Black. "White Man" argues with "Black Man" that Africa is not Black. "Black Man" says that there is no difference between being African and being Black. Here, "White Man" claims supremacy over "Black Man" in naming who can be "African," and by extension, "Black."[81]

Theatre critic Charles Isherwood remarks that "'We Are Proud' impressively navigates the tricky boundaries that separate art and life, the haunted present and the haunting historical past."[82] Isherwood observes an imbalance in the rehearsal room where the white characters dominate the space with the one-sided colonial German perspective from letters.[83] Isherwood comments, "But the temperature in the room really begins to rise when the black actors …begin to stew over using the [German] soldiers' letters as the groundwork for the show, in effect letting the oppressors shape the way the story is presented."[84] Drury uncovers the main point of contention with carefully crafted dialogue to show how Black characters resist German oppressor accounts and insist on representations of Africans, despite being dismissed.

Consequently, the play's dialogues are laced with casual racism, polite insults, defensiveness, microaggressions, anti-Blackness, antisemitism, a deliberate misogynoir specifically against the character "Black Woman" in addition to a denial of harm against the Black characters. African American feminist Moya Bailey coined, defined, and theorized the term, misogynoir in 2008 as a portmanteau of two words: "misogyny" and *noir*.[85] Misogyny is the hatred of women, and *noir* means "Black" in French. For Bailey, misogynoir is an "anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience particularly in US visual and digital culture."[86] Bailey further describes misogynoir as "uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization."[87] In the play, Drury masterfully

[80] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 45.

[81] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 69.

[82] Charles Isherwood, "Theatre Review: Acting Out a Blood Bath Brings Dangers of Its Own," *The New York Times*, November 16, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/17/theater/reviews/we-are-proud-to-present-a-presentation-at-soho-rep.html.

[83] Isherwood, "Theatre Review."

[84] Isherwood, "Theatre Review."

[85] Moya Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 1-2.

[86] Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed*, 1.

[87] Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed*, 1.

illustrates characters' misogynoir towards the "Black Woman" character, and extrapolates racialized and sexist dialogues in general that seem sad but true. For example, from the beginning of the play, the white characters dominate the rehearsal by insisting on telling the story of the genocide through letters written by German soldiers back to their wives and families, excluding any reference to Africans in Southwest Africa and the horrors of genocide.

To get back some order in a rather tense rehearsal, "Black Woman" shares her inspiration for researching and devising a play about the Herero people from a picture of a Herero woman she found in a magazine that looked "like [her] grandmother." [88]

Actor 6 [Black Woman]:
But the woman in this article
She looked like my grandmother
And suddenly I felt like I have a lineage.
I felt like maybe
I could point to a place
a specific country
a specific homeland
and I could say
there.
My family is from there.
And I found out that because my grandmother came to me
and told me about a genocide, where eight out of every
ten people in this tribe
my tribe had been murdered.[89]

"Black Woman" uses the picture of the Herero woman who resembled her grandmother as the basis for researching the genocide of the Herero and Namaqua in the first place.

"Black Woman" searches for a lineage in Africa and an African homeland with the picture of the Herero woman. She describes feelings of loss not having family ties and lineage in Africa; and was particularly moved by the Herero and Namaqua genocide that inspired her to gather the group of actors to tell the story. Saidiya Hartman's autobiography, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* is about the history of the Atlantic slave trade through her personal reflections as a descendant of enslaved Africans in the African Diaspora.[90] When Hartman traveled to Accra, Ghana, she talks about the stigma of being called *Obruni* from the Akan word *Oburoni* (or *buronyi* in Fante) means "foreigner," or "those who come from the

[88] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 53.
[89] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 53.
[90] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 4-5.

horizon."[91] *Obruni* colloquially means "white" or "white man," which is anyone with lighter skin than darker skinned Ghanaians, or even dark-skinned people in the African Diaspora, and anyone who is Asian, Middle Eastern, and European.

Hartman explains the stigma of "slave" as being a "… stranger. Torn from kin and community, exiled from one's country, dishonored and violated, the slave defines the position of the outsider, the coerced migrant, the foreigner, the shamefaced child in the lineage."[92] Descendants of enslaved Africans, like "Black Woman" in the play, experience a loss of an African lineage, and many often seek reconnection with Africa for family and belonging. Even in this beautiful moment of "Black Woman's" search for an African lineage, "Another White Man" and "Another Black Man" relentlessly mock "Black Woman" in a moment of misogynoir, and when "Black Man" calls attention to the erasure of African and the Black experience in their devised play.

In another devised scene, "White Man" and "Black Man" reenact how a Herero man, who had escaped to the desert with his people, and is now prevented from leaving the desert by a German soldier, role-played by "White Man." In role-playing, the German soldier played by "White Man" shoots and kills the Herero man played by "Black Man" for taking a step to leave the desert. Many Herero people escaped to the Omaheke desert after being encircled and ambushed in the Battle of Waterberg, one of several battles in the German-Herero War.[93] Under orders from General von Trotha, German soldiers shot and killed thousands of Herero men, women and children who were desperately trying to escape across the desert to modern-day Botswana, (formerly, the British Protectorate of Bechuanaland).[94]

This excerpt below shows the moment before "White Man," who plays a German soldier, shoots "Black Man" who portrays a Herero Man trying to leave the desert.

Actor 2 [Black Man]: Why can't you let me go? No one will know.
Actor 1 [White Man]: Might be true.
Actor 2 [Black Man]: If I go that way, I will die.
Actor 1 [White Man]: You might not.
Actor 2 [Black Man]: What if I run?
Actor 1 [White Man]: I'm a good shot.
Actor 2 [Black Man]: I'm a fast runner.
Actor 1 [White Man]: I'm a great shot.
Actor 2 [Black Man]: I'm —

[91] Bayo Hosley, *Routes of Remembrance: Refashioning The Slave Trade in Ghana* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 220.
[92] Hartman. *Lose Your Mother*, 4-5.
[93] "The Herero and Namaqua Genocide."
[94] "The Herero and Namaqua Genocide."

Actor 1 [White Man]: Don't make me shoot you.
Actor 2 [Black Man]: I'm not making you do anything.
Actor 1 [White Man]: Do not even take a step over here.
Actor 2 [Black Man]: You'll shoot me for a step?
Actor 1 [White Man]: I'll shoot you for breaking the law.
Actor 2 [Black Man]: I ain't breaking no law —
Actor 1 [White Man]: Why can't you just respect that I'm telling you the way it is.
Actor 2 [Black Man]: I'm just tryin' to get home.
[Pause] … Try […] instead.
Actor 1 [White Man]: Don't you take one step.
Actor 2 [Black Man]: I'm going home.
Actor 1 [White Man]: Do not —
Actor 2 [Black Man]: You can't stop me —
Actor 1 [White Man]: Take one step —
Actor 2 [Black Man]: From going home –
Actor 1 [White Man]: Don't —
Actor 2 [Black Man]: You can't stop me —
Actor 1 [White Man]: Not one step — Don't —
Actor 2 [Black Man] *takes a step.*
Actor 1 [White Man] *immediately shoots him. We hear a loud shot.*[95]

"Black Man" as the Herero man is still alive as "White Man" as the German soldier continues shooting the Herero Man as he reads a letter beginning with "Dear Sarah" with each shot. As actors process these disturbing events in the Herero genocide, "Another White Man" is reminded of his great grandfather who fought for the Union Army in the American Civil War from 1861 to 1863; and who shot a fellow Union Soldier, who was Black. "Another White Man" explains that his great grandfather shot the Black Union soldier so that the Confederate army would see him shoot and kill a Black solider to be kept alive. "Another White Man" claims that this experience by his white great-grandfather must have been the same as a German soldier killing the Herero man in the desert. "Another White Man" compares his great grandfather's actions and guilt to justify the killing of the Herero, and then goes on the compare white guilt with Black experience. This leads to another tense debate at the core of the play about US American history, as it is about Germany's response to their crime of genocide against the Herero and Namaqua.

In the following section, Drury demonstrates how a normalized justification of racial violence against the Black body, out of a fear, is at the heart of a historical and contemporary anti-Blackness; and one where the irony is that "Another White Man" can demand and require

[95] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 80-81.

sympathy from the "Black Man" of whom he imagines should understand why his white great-grandfather who felt it necessary to shoot a Black Union soldier. [96]

Actor 3 [Another White Man]: …
An entire division of black men
Trained by the Union army
Fighting in their first battle.
Black men fighting in uniform, as equals.
And to the Southern soldiers, this was like the most
Offensive –
I mean the Southerners were fighting for independence
For the right to keep their slaves
And my great-grandfather saw his fellow soldiers not just
being shot,
He saw them being ripped apart in fury.
And my great-grandfather got pinned in a ditch with a
Blac -African-American Union soldier, and
As the Southerners got closer and closer,
And my great-grandfather saw the rage in their faces,
The confusion,
So my great-grandfather looked that Union soldier in the eye
And said 'I'm sorry'. And shot him.
And my great-grandfather saw that the Union soldier was still alive.
So my great-grandfather shot him again.
And he shot that soldier again,
And again, and
My great-grandfather shot him in fear – out of fear for this own life and
He shot him so that they would see him shooting him and
He shot him so that he would be captured and kept alive.

Beat.

Actor 2 [Black Man]: Are you finished?
Actor 3 [Another White Man]: (furious) Excuse me?
Actor 2 [Black Man]: That story doesn't have anything to do with Africa.
Actor 3 [Another White Man]: It's the same thing —
Actor 4 [Another Black Man]: It's not the same —[97]

[96] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 85-86
[97] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 85-86.

As the actors argue about white guilt and Black experience, white actors begin to question whether what happened to the Herero people was even a "genocide."[98] "White Man" sarcastically minimizes the Herero genocide as a "rehearsal Holocaust,"[99] compared to the Jewish Holocaust with antisemitic comments.

Those who were captured were sent to Shark Island or "Death Island,"[100] one of five concentration camps located in Luderitz, Namibia where Herero and Namaqua people endured forced labor, and inhumane conditions. German doctors and scientists conducted medical experiments on living and dead Herero and Namaqua people bolstering studies on scientific racism in the early twentieth century.[101] Andrew Zimmerman states that the Shark Island concentration camp became a template for Nazi Germany in the Jewish Holocaust.[102] Benjamin Madley uncovers an ideological link that justified German colonialism and genocidal methods in the Herero genocide and the Jewish Holocaust.[103] By including these references in the play, Drury draws on ideological links between the racial violence and lynching in the United States and genocidal threats with the Herero and Namaqua genocide.

The killing of the Herero man played by "Black Man" in the previous scene is paralleled with "Black Man" escaping an antebellum plantation in the US American South, but instead of being shot, is nearly lynched. A turning point in the play is when the actors transition from reenacting the Herero people in forced labor working on the railroad in Southwest Africa to "Black Man" and other Black actors in chattel slavery on a plantation in the US American South. With the subtle change in accents from an African accent for the Herero, to a US American Southern accent, the location is set in the US American South. In this excerpt, the characters begin to role-play a scene from slavery with a work song by enslaved Africans as white slave drivers simultaneously say "*Round 'em up. Chain 'em up. Lead 'em up. Lock 'em up*"[104] over the song.

White Man, Another White Man [Sarah]:
Round 'em up.
Chain 'em up.
Lead 'em up.

[98] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 88
[99] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 59.
[100] "The Herero and Namaqua Genocide."
[101] "The Herero and Namaqua Genocide."
[102] Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihuman in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 244.
[103] Benjamin Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 35, No. 3 (2005): 429.
[104] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 94.

Lock 'em up.
(repeat)
Black Man, Another Black Man [Black Woman]:
Take me to my home
Take me to that place
Place that I am from
Take me to my home
Home that ain't my home
Where do I belong
Took me from my home
Place where I belong
Place that's now your home
Where I don't belong—[105]

"Black Man" says "I don't belong here, and begins leaving the rehearsal."[106] "White Man" and "Another White Man" carry on role-playing as white slave drivers and overseers that soon turn into mob behavior. "White Man" and "Another White Man" encircle "Black Man" with taunts and racist jokes, picking up to a frenzied pace. In this Afro-dystopia, Drury goes back to US southern plantation with a history of chattel slavery and lynching to connect a US Black experience with an African experience.

As if the actors had rehearsed this part before, the characters role-play the escape of an enslaved African ("Black Man"). "Black Man" runs away from the racial violence as the ensemble chants "Running. Running. Run …"[107] Then the white actors throw a noose up on a beam onstage, and put a noose around "Black Man's" neck. They begin reenacting a lynching event on stage, an echo of America's past. "Black Man," who had already broken from his character in the scene and speaks as the actor to the audience, says, "Help me. Seriously. Help me. Get this fucking thing off me."[108] He breaks free and removes the noose from his neck and exits in horror. "Black Woman" goes after him. These two characters never appear on stage again. The role-play ends and the white actors begin laughing with discomfort and awkward silences in-between and then laughter several times more, before a loud scream from one of the characters.[109]

The play ends when the white actors exit one-by-one, leaving "Another Black Man" in shock and horror, who tries to say something to the audience, but can't. Alone on stage,

[105] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 94.
[106] Drury, We Are Proud To Present, 94
[107] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 101.
[108] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 101.
[109] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 102.

"Another Black Man" packs up the rest of the props in a box, and finally puts away the noose, the symbol of racial terror used on the Herero people and on Black people in American history.[110] Drury states that the violence in the play should be "real contact."[111] By this, she notes that:

> …the performance calls for real contact, as opposed to realistic contact. Actions that might make an audience wonder how they were done will work against the play. A slap to the shoulder, a loose rope around the neck: these things will feel much more dangerous than elaborate choreography or invisible rigging, in the end.[112]

We Are Proud To Present is not a fantasy, nor the suspension of disbelief in theatre. Drury wants readers and audiences to experience the danger of racial violence to raise awareness about anti-Blackness in the United States and the genocide against Herero and Namaqua peoples.

Digital Media Montage: "Oooh, I am terrified!"

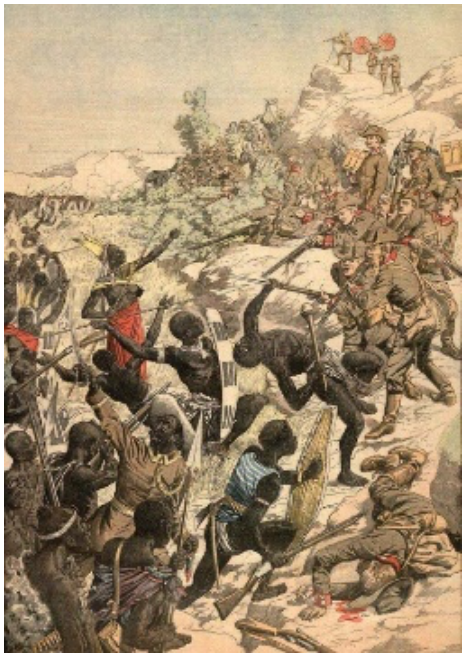

Figure 3, "Herero Attack in Okahandja, German Southwest Africa, 1903," *Le Petit Journal*, February 21, 1904, pg. 8. As documented in Brigit Schinke's article, "Battle of Waterberg (1904)," *Black Past*, May 6, 2015, https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/battle-waterberg-1904/.

The digital media montage, "Oooh, I am terrified!" was used in place of "Black Man's" physical and tactile contact with a noose, especially during the racial reckoning in the virtual

[110] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 100.
[111] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 4.
[112] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 4.

production of *We Are Proud To Present*. Below are excerpts from the script used in the digital media montage. The phrase with the counts 7a and 7b is a rhythm for the speech, chants, and/or percussion in the text. I chose a choral speech pattern in recorded voiceovers.

7a: 1-2, 1-2, 1-2-3:

Another White Man:	**White Man**:	**Black Man**:
Ooogaa booga	I am a man from	I am a black man I have
Ooogaa booga	Africa and	been a black man always I
Ooogaa booga	I alone can	remember what it was to
Ooogaa booga	Remember the	be a man alone I am
Ooogaa booga	Africa that	a black man I have been a
Ooogaa booga	I was from	black man always black always

[…]

7b: 1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1:

Black Man:	**All Others**:
I have been black all my life	Running. Running. Run
I have been black all my life	running. Running. Run

Cheers.

7a: 1-2, 1-2, 1-2-3:

White Man: I heard a joke once.
How do you stop a
Nigger from going out?
Pour more gas on him.

7b: 1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1:

Black Man:	**All Others**:
I have been black all my life	Running. Running. Run

I have been black all my life running. Running. Run[113]

My methodology in creating a digital media montage was theatre practice-as-research (PaR), which Robin Nelson defines as:

> [involving] a research in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice (creative writing, dance, musical score/performance, theatre/performance, visual exhibition, film, or other cultural practice) is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry.[114]

PaR is a method that uses practice in theory, and in this case, directing using a digital media montage in the theatre production. My research question throughout this process was, how did the digital media montage protect the actor playing "Black Man" from being further traumatized as a surrogate for racial violence? For this, I focused on the motif of a running Black man on a dirt road in the film. The theme/concept was an Afro-dystopian vision with echoes from the past interlocking with the present, and future. An Afro-dystopia in directing *We Are Proud To Present* in 2021 illuminated the plight of Black people overrun by colonialism and white supremacy from past to present, and who have resisted. Afro-dystopianists like Olukotun, are concerned about the future and fate of Black people,[115] and call into question the violence of white supremacy and colonialism in parallel histories in Drury's *We Are Proud To Present* with references to Africa and the African Diaspora.

Given the gravity of events from 2020-2021, the emotional and psychological toll on cast members, including retraumatizing Black actors, I created a digital media montage that captured the historical events from the genocide in Africa with Black experience in the United States with image and film. Historical references included the Herero and Namaqua genocide, the Ku Klux Klan in white regalia in from lynching in the United States, to current protests, white supremacy, and racism. I conceived and used this montage in place of the racial violence on "Black Man" without changing the script or the playwright's intent. So, I made an executive decision to compose a digital media montage to protect the Black actor playing "Black Man" in this situation, understanding the terror of just holding a noose, which is the ultimate lynching symbol. Then, I showed the digital media montage to the cast members for their approval for use in place of "Black Man's" embodiment in the scene. The cast unanimously approved.

I used this digital media montage as an installation or surrogate for the physical, tactile, contact by "Black Man" with a noose, especially during the racial reckoning when a Black

[113] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 98.

[114] Robin Nelson, "The What, When, Where and Why of 'Practice as Research'," in *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistance*, ed. Robin Nelson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 9.

[115] Olukotun, "Utopian and Dystopian Visions of Afrofuturism."

technoculture as activism was well underway in social media, like Black Twitter. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross define technoculture as:

> the work of everyday work and fantasies by everyday people, and that to deny people the ability to see themselves as in control of their mediatized environment in social media, 5g phones and wifi exacerbates the limits of democracy.[116]

Sylvie Octobre concurs that technoculture is inherently political for individuals publicly and privately, and that culture has shifted from knowledge to expression.[117] However, a Black technoculture, is the agency within digital communities and everyday Black people to exercise agency and autonomy by digital means. Using Black technoculture certainly empowered the process and use of the digital media montage in the virtual production in providing agency over historical images to counter racist colonial histories.

As André Brock puts it, Black technoculture is "the relationship between, and politics of, and culture and technology,"[118] and centers Black experience as inherently in digital media practices. Brock suggests that Black technology users, especially on social media platforms "make sense of their existence as users and as subjects within advanced technological artifacts, services, and platforms."[119] Catherine Knight Stele goes further to theorize a Black feminist technoculture, where Black women are central figures in understanding how "oppression and resistance shapes their ability to understand and utilize communication technologies."[120] An example of Black feminist technoculture is Frazier's filming of the last moments of Floyd's killing, posted to social media platforms to appeal to some humanity.[121] As a Black woman scholar/director, the process of creating a digital media montage enhances my artistic practice and research in Black feminist technoculture.

The main feature in the digital media montage was the recurring stock video of a Black man running on a dirt road with actors' voiceovers of "Running. Running. Run. Running. Running. Run"[122] representing the Black man being chased until the image of the noose appears. The sequence of images, voiceovers, and the running Black man, signifies the historical present,

[116] Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, "Introduction," in *Technoculture*, ed. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xiii.

[117] Sylvie Octobre, *Youth Technoculture: From Aesthetics to Politics* (London: Routledge, 2020), 140.

[118] André Brock, *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 210.

[119] Brock, *Distributed Blackness*, 210.

[120] Catherine Knight Steele, *Digital Black Feminisms* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 51.

[121] Treisman, "Darnella Frazier."

[122] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 101.

and a futuristic time of racial violence and genocide across geography and time. Below shows the beat and rhythmic, with Drury's suggestion of counts, *1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1*:[123]

All Others:
Running. Running. Run.
Running. Running. Run.
Running. Running. Run.
Running. Running. Run.[124]

In addition to the passage above, the video includes voiceovers of "Black Man" repeating the line "I have been black all my life,"[125] like every Black man (and Black woman) running through tenuous historic to futuristic landscapes. The voiceovers, perhaps the most terrifying in the digital media montage, capture the violence and terror with racist jokes, laughs, and jeers reminiscent of the terror of historical lynching events, and relate to the genocide. Drury shows how discussions of race become apocalyptic over the course of the play with increasing encounters of racial violence against Black bodies. Race as apocalyptic inspired my directing as an Afro-dystopian praxis centered on Black experience with historical and futuristic references to Africa and the African Diaspora. By focusing on the multilayered histories in the digital media montage with photographs, comic strips, and film from former Southwest Africa (now Namibia) and the United States, I teased out the seemingly unassuming casualness around how discussions of race are weaponized, which prompted physical attacks, adverse racialized language, and racially aggressive actions toward Black characters especially the always running "Black Man" as the play progressed.

Conclusion

To conclude, a digital media montage in the play, *We Are Proud To Present* provided me some agency as a Black woman artist-academic using practice to disseminate knowledge about Black life. Creating a digital media montage provided virtual audiences a recap of historical references in the play in a difficult but digestible way, and offered some respite to the actor playing "Black Man" who was not required to embody racial trauma. I cannot stress enough how urgent it is to show a range of Black experiences from Black perspectives by Black artists, including a historiography of the colonial experience, be it racism, genocide, or any form of violence. Afro-dystopia does just that; and Drury's play, *We Are Proud To Present* shows Black experience in Africa and in the United States writ large.

Drury captures Black experience in the play, *We Are Proud To Present*, in the motif of the running "Black Man." In these moments, he is a character who acts as a surrogate of racial

[123] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 101.
[124] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 99.
[125] Drury, *We Are Proud To Present*, 100.

violence in parallel scenes of a Herero man running away from being shot by a German soldier, and as a male African American actor who is running away from being lynched by an angry white mob. Drury straddles the parallel history of Germany's genocide of the Herero and Namaqua with the history of lynch mob with the "Black Man" always running to extinction, "until they disappear upon the face of the earth"[126] as Du Bois predicted in 1899. Drury illustrates a shared history of colonialism, white supremacy, and anti-Blackness in the African Diaspora, articulating a "universal" anti-Blackness in the character of *every* "Black Man" (and Black woman too) in what is called an Afro-dystopia. The play is relevant in current debates of police brutality and the extrajudicial killings of Black people, Black Lives Matter activism, and global anti-colonial activism.

It was, and is, by telling the story of the first genocide of the twentieth century of the Herero and Namaqua people, that Germany on May 28, 2021, finally acknowledged their atrocities as genocide,[127] and a month after this virtual production of *We Are Proud To Present* closed on April 25, 2021. I would like to think that our production, which ended weeks before Germany acknowledged their crimes as genocide, played a small part in arts activism. However, it was really the sheer strength and resilience of the Herero and Namaqua and anti-colonial and genocide activists supported by Ancestors who continued their decades-long activism. Drury's theatre of satirical dramedy certainly helped in raising awareness and consciousness. An Afro-dystopian praxis and vision of the running "Black Man" in Drury's *We Are Proud To Present* are at the nexus of a post-apocalyptic moment: a pandemic, systemic racism, and a racial reckoning. An Afro-dystopia in *We Are Proud To Present* is the constant and always running Black Man—running across space; running across time; running to a bleak and uncertain future; but one that invites audiences to interrogate and engage.

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"The Running 'Black Man'" digital media montage can be found on our website in Volume 2, Issue 1 July 2023 at https://journals.librarypublishing.arizona.edu/tbtr/.

[126] Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, 269.
[127] "The Herero and Namaqua Genocide."

Content Warning: The digital media montage contains violence against Black people including images of murder, lynching, and death. Viewer discretion is strongly advised.

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