UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

WHAT IN THE WORLD:
A STUDY OF QUESTIONS OF REPRESENTATION AND PERMISSION

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

Brian Scott Carmack

June 2020

This Thesis of Brian Scott Carmack
is approved:

_____
Dr. Patty Gallagher

_____
Dr. Michael Chemers

_____
Dr. Danny Scheie

_____
Quentin Williams
Acting Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

What in the World:

A Study of Questions of Representation

And Permission

By

Brian Scott Carmack

In our ever-changing, turbulent social and political climate, issues of race, racism, and representation continue to be a high-profile aspect of society. When scrutinizing US history, taking into consideration the mistreatment communities of color, we must take into account the error of our past and consider how these communities left with indelible ideas of misrepresentation have been affected. When examining our own societal and cultural viewpoints, we must consider the sensibilities experienced by people of color. Though society has made significant strides in the areas of equal rights and equality over the past 50 years with the success of the 1960s civil rights movement, the question of misrepresentation communities of color remains a significant area of concern for the community, even in today's progressive environment. On the evening of November 8, 2019, the opening night of UC Santa Cruz's production of the Dharma-Grace Award-winning script, *What in the World?,* a play addressing issues of homelessness, poverty, and racism, a protest by students of color took place in which they stormed the theatre and took over the stage. This extreme action led to the cancellation of the remainder of the evening's performance and the subsequent six performances.

In light of this event, it is clear that POC concerns of misrepresentation remain prevalent in our student body here at UCSC. To best understand the protest, it is essential to examine the event and to assess the present. In doing so, it is necessary to take a current cultural snapshot of the sensibilities of both the community of students of color, as well as their "white" counterparts, which comprise a significant portion of the student body here at UCSC. The use of critical race theory to examine the motives behind this event will inform and possibly justify such an act of extremism, however, may uncover a reality in which our younger generations have succumbed or surrendered to the ideologies of the past rather than create new doctrines of a developing and progressive cultural movement. To test my hypothesis, I will conduct an ethnographic study of members of the UCSC student body, including both students of color and Caucasian participants. By sampling opinions, viewpoints, and value systems of members of our student body, I will provide a current assessment and cultural snapshot, which will aid in understanding the current state of racial concerns in the Theatre Arts Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and provide insight into questions of representation, embodiment, and permission.

Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to personally express my gratitude to the faculty and staff of the Theater Arts Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Without their support and encouragement, I do not believe that I would have achieved all that I have at UCSC. I would personally like to express special gratitude to Dr. Michael Chemers, Dr. Daniel Scheie, and Dr. Patty Gallagher, without whose guidance this thesis would not have been as successful. Also, I wish to thank Marianne Weems and Josh Karter for their support during my graduate year.

To my family, friends, and loved ones who have supported me on this journey, I say thank you for the love and support over the past year.

To the cast and creative team of *What in the World?,* I thank you for helping me become a better theater practitioner and artist. Our time together taught me much.

WHAT IN THE WORLD: A STUDY IN QUESTIONS OF REPRESENTATION AND PERMISSION

Art reflects life, and life reflects art. Theatre can hold up a mirror to society, provoking thought, action, or even social change. Theatre is an art form that entertains and can provoke laughter, but it can also confront its audience. It can challenge its viewers to think deeply about the topics and themes depicted. As creators of theater, we must make conscious decisions about which stories to tell. Do we only tell stories conveying beauty and happiness, dealing only with utopia, or do we dig deeper into the reality of all of what life entails: the good the bad and the ugly? In doing so, we are faced with the questions: Who has the right to say what? Who has permission to represent whom?

I believe that as artists, we are challenged to represent all that life is or even the possibilities of what life could be. We sometimes illuminate joy, love, and happiness. Other times, we dare to illuminate negative realities. In either case, we strive to address the subject matter with insight, compassion, and respect. As a Director, I aim to depict the world around us with a sense of wonder, inquiry, and truth. I encourage my actors to strive to portray characters intellectually, emotionally, physically, and with compassion.

Sometimes the roles actors assume can be perceived as a negative representation of a community, taken as offensive in the unintentional stereotypes they seem to portray. In trying to expose new ideas of social issues, playwrights may create characters that provoke unintended reactions from the audience or community.

But this should not invalidate the playwright's or actors' bravery in trying to grapple with these more sensitive elements of life and society. In hindsight, I believe this may be the crux of the conflict with *What in the World?*

As a Director and MA student, I accepted the challenge to grapple with challenging material for the Fall production at UCSC. The 2019 Dharma Grace[1] Award-winning script by student playwright Nick Domich entitled *What in the World?* is a specific example of a creative endeavor that raised conflict surrounding topics of representation, the embodiment of others and intersectionality, and caused an unexpected student-led protest on the opening night of the production.

In this study, I will attempt to bring questions of identity, representation, and permission into sharper focus. First, I will describe my process and experience with the production, including the protest that occurred on November 8th, 2019. I will explain what went wrong and what I feel the disconnects were. I will also apply critical race theorists Kimberlé Crenshaw's description of erasure and discussion on intersectionality, and Harry J Elam Jr.'s, *Reality Check* to the play and production and the social protest it created. Secondly, I will engage other prominent theatre artists, such as Anna Deavere Smith, and use their work to help clarify ideas of representation and embodiment. Through engaging with these theorists and artists, I hope to understand what might have led to the complexities of the production and use this as grounds for thinking about theatre, its possibilities, and its vulnerabilities.

[1] The Dharna Grace Foundation Playwrighting Award is a specific award founded by television director, writer, and producer Chuck Lorre that selects one student-written/ student-directed play, in select years, to be produced by the University of California, Santa Cruz Theatre Arts Department.

Lastly, I will include a portion of interviews conducted with participants of the production and the playwright, which will aid me in shedding light on the current state of racial views within the Theatre Arts Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the playwright's experience with the production.

What in the World?: The Production

As part of my Master's studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, I directed the play entitled *What in the World?* in the Fall of 2019. *What in the World?*, written by a mature, white, male student, in the style of naturalism, is the story of Millie, an African American homeless woman who gave birth in a dumpster to a still-born infant some years ago, and now struggles with mental instability. In the play, she interacts with members of the homeless community in Sacramento, California, who face struggles of poverty, health, discrimination, and addiction. She finds camaraderie, support, and companionship while never giving up hope of finding her lost child.

Some of the incidents depicted in the play were based on real-life events. The piece grapples with issues of homelessness, poverty, drug addiction, mental illness, and racism. The playwright hoped it would be a realistic depiction of reality from within the homeless community and bring to light some of their issues and challenges. In the course of the play, the characters expose their daily challenges, their personal predicaments, their thought processes, and the negative side of human nature. Ideally, this would force the audience to ask: Who are the have-nots? Who are

the less fortunate? Why are the majority of the less fortunate people of color? and whose right is it to ask these questions?

These questions demand to be addressed. But who has the correct answer? Is there one? *What in the World?* fueled a fire surrounding these questions, which initiated this case study.

What in the World? is no exception when considering how we, as humans, theater makers, and artists, choose to investigate and address these issues. To say the questions of permission and representation didn't come up for the participants during the production of the play would be to underestimate the power of art, language, truth, and observation. If this is the case for those who would be exposed to the result of or have the experience of translating words into action, it would seem as if one committed some sort of moral or ethical crime. But, I wondered, a crime against who: a crime against those who would perform such material, those who would be witness to the performance, or those who the content describes?

From the protest that occurred November 8th, 2019, it was evident who was offended. To best describe this event, it is vital to go back to the beginning, to the time where the very creation of this production, riddled with a myriad of challenges, began to take shape.

As controversial as some of the subject matter is, *What in the World?* serves to hold a mirror to society and gives a voice to a community often forgotten and overlooked. As director of this controversial piece, I have no regrets about having been a part of this production. I admit the creation of this play was a challenging and

problematic experience from the beginning. I'm writing this thesis in hopes of finding a new way to tackle these issues. I want to inspire thought and discussion of how we creators of theatre may be able to do better in the future and how we may learn from this experience.

Producing *What in the World?*:

At the outset, I knew the production faced many casting challenges upfront, and there was an opportunity to take action in a way that might have encouraged the participation of students of color. The script, written to tell a very human story, was, in places, highly offensive and, because of the nature of truth, challenging to engage with. I hope this experience provides thought for future improvement, inclusivity, and learning. It is important to honestly and openly discuss the process, the significant issues, and the outcome.

Casting

The month: September 2019; the event: UCSC general auditions for fall quarter productions. As I sat anxiously awaiting the first auditions for *What in the World?*, I felt a sense of wonder and excitement yet at the same time, I felt a sense of anxiety. With a cast comprised of nine acting roles, four of which were African American, two of which were Latinx, two Caucasian, and one specified only by the name Abdul, I knew it would be a challenge to cast. How many actors might show up for the auditions? How will I ever be able to find as many actors of color for which

the script called? I was unsure of how many actors of color we had in the department or on campus. Unfortunately, as anticipated, it was apparent in the callbacks that casting the piece as scripted would be impossible. Not only did we have too few African American actors present at the auditions, only *one* African American actress auditioned.

The playwright and I comprised a plan to spread the word widely across campus that we were casting a play that required actors of color. I took it upon myself to post publicly across the UCSC Theater Arts Department site, including the Facebook page most often visited by members of the Theater Arts Department. The playwright visited areas of campus where African Americans assembled and began to speak openly to them about his play. Additionally, we organized an open call for any actors or students of color who may have otherwise been uninformed of general auditions and wished to audition for the show.

These additional efforts proved fruitless. I faced the reality that we would have to strategize significantly to cast the show from the pool of actors who were present at the callbacks. There was an understandable air of resistance from the playwright, who posed the obvious question: "How are we supposed to do my play with white actors?" I felt a sense of anxiety. I knew that to produce the play successfully; we would have to rethink our casting strategy. It was clear the only African American actress to audition would be our choice to act the leading role. Although we did not have the required number of African Americans, I was able to cast the show to feature actors of varying ethnicities.

I thought this the best way to serve the script without being literal. I assured the playwright that it was the best solution to our problem. To enrich the cast further, I cast three additional ensemble members of diverse ethnicities. Throughout this process, we were in constant contact with the Department Chair, David Cuthbert, about our precarious casting situation. Professor Cuthbert offered to extend the auditions into the following week. I thought this would hold up the progress of production. After our fruitless efforts to extend auditions, I encouraged Professor Cuthbert we should move forward. And so, we did.

The Rehearsal

The first evening of rehearsal was filled with anticipation. I could sense the excitement in the air as we gathered around the tables, ready for our first table read. I, being a first-time director, wanted to ensure the cast we were aware of the challenges faced where casting and the script were concerned, and that we were going to do our best to address these challenges during the rehearsal process. After a short introduction of the creative team, we began the first table read. We openly addressed the situation of there being text within the play where ethnicity was either implied or explicitly stated and that some of these passages would require rewriting and adjustment to suit the actors that were cast. Although the cast was enthusiastic, there was a minor yet certain tension that filled the air. With the passage of each scene where ethnicity was explicit, I could sense the uneasy feeling it created amongst the actors. We pressed through until the end of the play.

The subject matter of the play itself was troublesome and thought-provoking. In some places, the characters' lines were extraordinarily controversial and profoundly racist. For example, in Act II, ii, in a discussion between the characters of Officers Threadbare and White, Officer White states, "The homeless have the ax murderer gene." This statement causes further conversation between the characters regarding the mind of a criminal. Officer Threadbare eventually replies, "My dad used to say that black people had the murder gene." Officer White reproaches Threadbare by saying, "You had to go there, huh? Now we're getting somewhere. If you like walking on quicksand. Your dad? Not you, huh?" to which Threadbare responds, "No, my dad. He said, "Look at how many blacks are arrested for murder." This text is the most substantial incident of racial slurs that appear in the script. In all fairness, later in the scene, Officer White states, "The murder gene? I don't know about black people and the murder gene, but white people have the serial killer gene." And I believe this scene presents the most controversial text in the script. These statements provoked analysis, discomfort, and discussion, and all this intentionally. Juxtaposed to these challenging racial issues in this scene, which highlight the negative side of the play, the play also highlighted elements of friendship, camaraderie, kindness, and hope.

Immediately following the first table read, I felt it necessary to address the most obvious point of confusion. It was apparent the actors were looking to the playwright or me for answers. "How will this work?" asked one of the actors. I reassured the cast we were aware of these problematic moments and were willing to

make the necessary changes to the script so that these "offenses" would be corrected. I assured the cast that, regardless of the needed changes, we were going to tell a human story. This seemed to reassure the group.

Honestly, our rehearsal process was not an easy one. The weekly rehearsals ran smoothly. However, I faced challenges. Several members of the cast expressed their disdain of the material. They confided their inability to connect with the content of the play and what the characters were supposed to be doing. They felt like they were committing some sort of a moral crime and found it difficult to engage in actions that the script called for. This called for action on my part.

I called a meeting one Friday evening during rehearsal. It was brought to my attention there was one member of the cast who, due to the content of the play, was considering dropping out of the production. This was hugely upsetting to me and the project on as a whole. We had worked hard as a team, and I wanted to be sure this cast member, whose work I greatly admired, remained in the production. Also, the emotional response of the cast to the controversial content and action of this play had become an issue. We openly and honestly discussed how to proceed with the production.

Because of the play's controversial content, including drug abuse, the use of needles, birth in a dumpster, and profoundly racist remarks, several cast members expressed their desire to have specific trigger warnings posted in the program. They were concerned that the content would be perceived as racist or defamatory, which, in performance, would offend the audience. When this was addressed in our weekly

production meetings, there was pushback. The department claimed the protocol was only to include the statement "adult content" in the program. I realized it was best to shelve the discussion for the moment and possibly revisit it at a later date.

The next unexpected event was that I had to address the fact that a couple of cast members confided they were uncomfortable having the playwright in the building for the entire rehearsal process. Some Actors claimed that this stifled their creativity, and they felt they had little room to explore. As uncomfortable as this made me feel, I thought it was in the best interest of my company that I "protect" them to the best of my ability as Director so, I chose to close rehearsals to any outside parties other than the actors two weeks before opening night. I felt this the best course of action given the circumstances.

In dealing with my actors, I found it challenging to instill the idea that it was not their responsibility to protect the audience from the play. It was their job simply to portray the play's content as honestly as possible. I found this difficult because we were dealing with human emotion, based on ideologies and widely held beliefs and opinions. But because of the sensitive nature of the topics and themes depicted, I wanted to handle the actors with the utmost respect and care. Never once did I feel they were against me in any way, the cast was cooperative and professional. And so, we proceeded.

Frankly, I was amazed at the results we achieved. I became proud of what we produced and felt the story was worth telling and the production worth viewing. We had done our job and were ready for opening.

Opening Night: The Protest

We met at 6:00 pm on the evening of Friday, November 8th, 2019. We had to deal with several extenuating circumstances that affected the show. The first order of business was addressing the fact that two of the actors would not be present at the first performance. One of the actors had not been emotionally well, and the other was caring for them. Both actors would have to be replaced. One of the other male actors decided to step in and perform the missing male role, acting both their original part and the role of their colleague, while the production assistant replaced the second missing actor.

Next, I was pulled aside by a senior staff member to discuss the fact there had been a formal complaint filed against the play to the higher-ups at UCSC. At this point, it was unclear whether we would proceed with the evening's performance. We decided to take a vote by secret ballot in which all actors in the production would vote whether or not to continue with the show. UCSC theatre Staff made it clear anyone from the production wishing not to participate could leave the theater at any given time.

The vote was unanimous to continue. We opened the floor for discussion to anyone who wished to state their opinion concerning the production. One of our student crew members, who was a woman of color, claimed it was not a piece of art and that it shed a negative light on the community of color. She posed the question, "Why would the University choose to do this piece?" and silently walked out of the

theater. It became clear who complained to the higher-ups. We quickly made necessary adjustments to address her absence and proceeded as planned.

The performance started approximately 15 minutes late. Though the audience was not large, I could feel the anticipation in the house. I sat at the back of the audience, proud of the decision the cast had made to perform.

Approximately 20 minutes into the first act, the doors to the theater flew open. Suddenly, students of color marching their way toward the stage filled the aisles, chanting. There was confusion in the audience and onstage. Then, I recognized the phrase ringing in the aisles. "Shut it down, shut it down!" they exclaimed. As they continued to chant, the approximately 20 participants filled the stage and proceeded to shout, "Shut it down, shut it down!" in rhythm. It was surreal. Confused, the actors did nothing at first. Audience members sat in awe, unsure of what was happening. They glanced around the house, themselves uncertain of what to do. As I realized what was happening, I stood calmly in place, attempting to maintain composure and simply observe. As the protesters flooded the stage, the stage manager sequestered the actors in the dressing room and locked the doors. It was unclear how this demonstration would play out. The chanting was intense. It was chaos. They stamped and shouted in rhythm, repeating over and over again, "Shut it down, shut it down!"

In response, we turned on the house lights. The loud chanting continued. One of the staff members stormed the stage, demanding the protesters exit the theater, but the protesters refused to move. Audience members stood in shock. With the house lights at full, one of the audience members, an approximately 50-year-old woman of

color, began filming the protest on her smartphone. As my eyes darted back and forth, trying to make sense of it all, I recognized more than one of the protesters, one in particular. It was the young woman, the crew member who had so strongly expressed disdain for the project, heading the protest. She paced the front of the stage, shouting, "Shut it down, shut it down!" while the others, shouting in unison, occupied the stage. They had taken over the theater, and we were helpless.

Eventually, the female protester engaged with the female audience member and began to have a discussion. The conversation was almost inaudible above the noise. The female audience member questioned the protesters' motives and assured the protester this was a story that needed telling. She revealed that the story was based on actual events in her life and that it was her story. The protester was stunned, almost speechless. Only after hearing this, she walked away, "Well, God bless you."

As if signaled by the leader, the protesters began to disperse. The chanting subsided. The shaken audience members began to leave the theater. The protesters started descending from the stage, down the stairs, up the aisles, towards the exits, expressing expletives. "It's not art!" exclaimed a younger female undergraduate, "I've made art my whole life! You can make art without fucking offending people!" to which another audience member replied, "Then go see a fucking musical!" "Who was offended?" the woman shouted after the girl, "How were you offended? Wait! Come talk!". There was no answer. It was over, at least for them.

The event was dramatic and traumatic. I rushed to the dressing room to check on the actors. It was evident they were shaken. It was as if their nightmare had come

true. Some cast members were in tears; others rushed to comfort them. Some had already left the theater. The staff member responsible for clearing the protesters from the stage was shaken. Then in the general confusion, two police officers arrived. The most important thing to me was that the actors were safe. I struggled to maintain my composure in front of the actors, but their tears deeply moved me. We had been violated. We had been silenced. We had been canceled.

The Aftermath

The next day, the message came from the Department Chair that the remainder of the weekend's performances were canceled. Hearing this news, I collected myself and drove to campus to find the stage manager, the production assistant, and several cast members in a rehearsal studio, discussing what had happened. It was as if we needed the comfort of each other to understand and process the events. Not everyone was present.

In the following days, things were unsure. After speaking with the Department Chair, then addressing the matter at a town hall held on Tuesday, the cast decided to have a private meeting on Wednesday, November 13th, to discuss the future of our production.

We gathered at 7:15 pm in a rehearsal studio. We discussed what happened and that people were affected in various ways by the protest, and were unsure whether or not they had the desire to continue with the production. It was an emotional time for all. I felt it was vital we continue to tell the story and thought it

would be a lost opportunity for us not to perform. I never openly voiced my opinion. I understood the severity of the protest and its effect on the actors. I knew it was the cast's decision and was not willing to sacrifice their well-being. They had been gravely affected by the protest and by the process of the production. They were the ones who needed to stand on the stage and tell the story, a story in which some of them had no faith.

We discussed three possibilities for performing the show again. One option was a closed performance for family and friends. Another was we do a closed performance and make a digital recording of the show to archive the play. The third was to continue with the second weekend in hopes of leading a discussion on Saturday night during the talkbacks. We also discussed other performance ideas. Members of the cast thought it might be cathartic to perform an improvisation based on the show. So, we took an anonymous vote. Out of the 11 cast members present, nine voted against the idea of performing the piece in any form. The decision was to not continue with the performances but to create an improv, which we agreed to schedule for Friday, November 15th, at 5:30 pm. Though disappointed, I understood the cast's decision. With this decision, the remaining performances of *What in the World?* were canceled, and the show was put to rest.

Catharsis and Closure

The cast reconvened on Friday, November 15th, at 4:00 pm in the theater. It was the first time we had entered the building since the protest. The house was

unchanged. The house seats and the stage, vacant of bodies, made the theater feel larger. The set served as a ghostly reminder of what we had endured the previous week. Regardless of these ghosts, there was an air of joy in the room. The actors laughed and made jokes as they took the stage and prepared to rehearse the improvisation planned for that afternoon. Not every cast member was present.

The actors began by brainstorming ideas for the show. It was inevitable there would be many references to the show and the script. I sat at the back of the house and looked joyfully on. The process was creative as the actors spun ideas and worked well together. They experimented with each suggestion of how to create a comic version of the show and engaged in small improvs built around those ideas. For them, the bad taste of the opening night was no longer there. They were ready to create theater, only this time an improvisation where they could spoof moments of the play and play freely on the stage with a variety of subject matter from the story. It was their way to release the tension from the protest.

We opened the house doors at 5:15 pm, letting in any audience members. It was an intimate audience of colleagues and friends. Some of the faculty also joined to watch. The 45-minute show, full of parody based on specific scenes, filled the small audience with laughter. The cast entertained each other and themselves, while at the same time offering the audience an afternoon of joy-filled improvisation. They spoofed relationships between the characters, turning the racist police officers into secret lovers, and created parodies of some of the more disturbing parts of the play. Their ideas were bright, and the improvisation, hilarious. Through this performance, I

believe they began to heal the emotional stress that they had endured. No longer was the stage a place of fear and confusion, but a place of joy and catharsis. They were able to let go of their demons. They were able to release past tensions and ill feelings surrounding opening night. It was their moment, their creation, their time to shine, which they did.

The Analysis: Identity, Representation, and Critical Race Theory

In the following sections, I will revisit the protest through the lens of critical theory in hopes of gaining a better understanding the outcome. In my description of the protest, it is essential to isolate a specific moment fueled with emotion, which serves as a perfect jumping-off point for bringing this event into an extensive discussion. After bringing the show to a halt, the protesters, spearheaded by one black female student, demanded the show be shut down. At this moment, the black female audience member, upon whose experience the play was based, assured the leader that though it was not a positive play, it was an important story. "This is my story," the audience member stated. This information seemed to be too much for the female protester to handle as she, almost stupefied, questioned what was said. "Why can't I come to see my story?" asked the audience member. After realizing who she was talking to, the female protester simply stated, "Well, God bless you," then departed back to her group. She essentially erased the experience of the black woman in the audience. It was as if she couldn't confront or acknowledge the truth of the play and its content, as well as the woman's story. Perhaps, here, there was a struggle for hope,

the hope an understanding of both sides could occur. But what happened was a lost opportunity; the opportunity for healthy discussion between what the play truly represented, and the perception of the protesters, these two things being quite different from another.

The moment between the two women resulted in what Harry J. Elam Jr. refers to in his essay, *Reality Check,* as "a collision between the real and representational" (p.176). Elam refers to the funeral of a young black boy named Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old who, in 1955, was severely beaten to death for looking at a white woman. In this tragic case, the collision was between the real, the open casket in which young Emmett's body was displayed, his face battered beyond recognition, and the representational, the portrait of a young, smiling face, void of any culpability, which hung inside his casket. These two realities juxtaposed one another, resulting in an uproar in the black community, presenting what is referred to as by Elam as a "reality check," a moment that "traumatically ruptures the balance between the real and the representational. It is the moment that, in the dissonance, generates demands that the relationship between the real and the representation be renegotiated" (p.173). The evening of November 8th was a reality check.

Referring to Elam's concept of "real vs. representation," in this case, the "real," what I believed the show to portray, and the "representation," the perception of the protesters, collided to create the perfect storm. As a white male, I perceived the play as telling an authentic, human story about homeless people in poverty. I saw the play as a depiction of people belonging to the homeless community, some of whom

happened to be people of color. Through this narrow lens, I didn't fully realize the offense others could take or feel at the subject matter. After the protest, I realized my naiveté.

A Reality Check of My Own

The night of the protest, I experienced a "reality check" of my own. The protest forced me and the cast to take a more in-depth look into what was at stake. We did more than merely present a play because the play depicted a picture of reality in which a significant number of homeless characters were also people of color. In doing so, the play inadvertently made a commentary about these communities. I anticipated there would be offense taken to the noticeably racist remarks made in Act Two. However, the question of perceived representation eluded our conversations before opening night. I had heard the protester and the audience member's conversation and was ready to talk and engage in meaningful dialogue.

The play's intentional commentary and narrative concerning the homeless community also inadvertently made a commentary on people of color. This representational commentary hit harder for some populations than others. It may have been comfortable for the white community to sit back and view this story, however, the female protester took offense and saw it through a specific lens, one in which the representation of people of color was at stake. It was clear that she and the protesters felt personally identified or attacked by these representations. I heard her. I heard them. Their voice mattered.

Historically, the white population hasn't faced as many struggles for identity as have people of color. African American citizens have not been represented in a positive light by other communities, mainly mainstream, white America. Dating back as far as the beginning of slavery, extending into modern-day society, patterns of negative narratives and unkind stereotypes have been continually present in the media, television, and films. Often, we see characters who are either drug dealers, homeless, or criminals, portrayed by actors of color. Because of this, negative connotations and stereotypes have continued to brainwash society into continuing to uphold these representations as truths. I understand this to be accurate and hoped to connect to the lead female protester to discuss her viewpoint further.

People of color struggle for justice and positive representation. This struggle is evident in the February 2020 shooting of Ahmaud Arbery, an innocent, young, black man who, while jogging, was gunned down by two white males who claimed to believe he was responsible for recent break-ins in the neighborhood. The perpetrators gunned him down because of their, albeit false, perception of a black male. After months of no action on the part of authorities, the two perpetrators were finally charged with the crime.

In an equally disturbing example of blatant mistreatment of the African American community, the more recent, unnecessary death of George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man arrested after being accused of trying to pass a counterfeit 20-dollar bill to a grocery store clerk, died while under police custody. This event in which four officers, including one Derek Chauvin, took Floyd to the ground, using his

knee to pin Floyd's neck to the pavement, causing Floyd to lose consciousness, resulting in his death, has created riots across the nation. Days after the incident, Chauvin, responsible for causing the death of Floyd, was charged with third-degree murder. This underscores the presence of inherent racial inequality in America and highlights injustice where African Americans are concerned. It solidifies the never-ending plight of the African American community for equality, justice, and positive representation, which directly relates to their struggle.

The Disconnect

It is no wonder the protesters felt the need to engage in active protest on opening night. The protesters, who may or may not have related to the themes or characters of the play in a more intersectional way, viewed it as a representational assault. I saw it through one lens and, after witnessing the outcome, through a wider, more inclusive one. These juxtaposed realities caused a certain disconnect. The disconnect was most likely the catalyst for the protesters to take action in the way they did, and I wanted to know more.

An additional point of disconnect was between the protester and the black female audience member. The black female audience member, whose story was being told, wanted to stand for the right for her story to be seen. As an innocent audience member, one cannot claim in what intersectional way she may have identified with the characters on stage. Yes, she was black, but in which other ways did she identify with these characters? The protester may have, perhaps, related to these characters

and wanted to take a stand, which is an enviable and intelligent position. Though both of these viewpoints represent sound value systems, it was evident, in this moment of confrontation, both viewpoints could not coexist.

The meeting of these two viewpoints presented the opportunity for a dialectic exchange. As Elam states, "reality checks brusquely rub the real up against the representational in ways that disrupt the spectators and produce new meanings. Most significantly, reality checks, in the unease that they cause audiences, can excite social action" (p.173). This was undoubtedly the case. The existence of these two "opposites" presented an opportunity for a third thing to emerge. The third thing being the dialectic conversation between the portrayed and the perceived. Unfortunately, following her dismissal by the protester, there was no further chance for discussion.

Intersectionality

Another fascinating jumping-off point for discussion is the theory of intersectionality. Intersectionality is defined as "the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage."

Kimberlé Crenshaw, both a leading scholar of critical race theory and educator at UCLA, explains these terms in true-to-life examples. In her lecture, "On Intersectionality," Crenshaw reminds us that people with multiple disqualifications

get multiply erased. She speaks of the vulnerability and discrimination experienced by black women across the nation. She explains in the case of black women and employment, they were doubly or multiply disadvantaged. On the one hand, black women wished to dispute the fact, though black men were being employed, black women were not because they were women, thus discriminated against with both sexism and racism.

On the other hand, white women were being hired because they were white and black women were not being hired because they were black, clearly an instance of racial discrimination. In this specific instance, it seemed apparent that white women could represent all women and black men all blacks. When suing for their rights, the courts claimed the black women had no real case because, though multiply disadvantaged or disqualified, they were asking for what Crenshaw calls "two strikes at the bat." This was potentially unfair to both white women and black men who could only complain about a single disadvantage. Black women's position was so fragile, being both black and female, that their voices were "erased" twice by society.

At the protest, both were women, and both were black, however, some categories of intersectionality are invisible. What we didn't know about either woman serves as a point of disconnect, a point where the unknown plays a significant role. Only in their exchange did it become evident that both women held a compelling viewpoint about the telling of this story. The determining action being, in the furious attempt not to be erased by being represented in a negative light, the protesters,

perhaps unintentionally, wholly erased the woman's experience and the lesson to be learned from it.

Citing the current example of the shooting of Ahmaud Arbery, one sees a connection between Elam's "reality check" and Kimberlé Crenshaw's "intersectionality." Arbery, the young man gunned down, was multiply disqualified. The first being he was male, the other identifying signifier being he was black. Historically, the intersectionality of these two characteristics has proven to lead to misfortune and injustice. In this specific case, the young man was also running, which adds a third layer of intersectional disadvantage. This horrific incident is yet another case for a reality check in the nation, a situation where the real and the representation clashed, causing a nation-wide uproar.

The Embodiment of Others

Theatre serves as an inarguable space of bravery. It is a space where one can tell stories dealing with controversial issues and negative themes. It allows us to discuss the contentious problems while providing insight and education on these issues. Society must take a look at itself, and through theater, we can do this.

By the time the play went into production, it was common knowledge that this play was scripted initially with the intention of the majority of characters being African American. During the protest, it became clear members of the protest took issue with this and with who was portraying which characters. They may have had an issue with what the story depicted about this particular community, and they may

have taken issue with what was being said by whom. But the situation of not having the "proper" cast, and no expression of concern from either the department or the student body, raised a cluster of issues.

In an attempt to better understand these problems, I have turned to artists who often embody characters who are not themselves, characters who represent varied ethnicities and social backgrounds, as possible guides in helping to justify our decisions concerning issues we confronted. Award-winning actress and educator Anna Deavere Smith addresses some of these issues in her book entitled *Fires in the Mirror*.

> Who has the right to say what?" "Who has the right to speak for whom?" these questions have plagued the contemporary theater. These questions addressed both issues of [employment] equity and issues of who is portrayed. These are the questions that unsettle and prohibit a democratic theater in America. If only a man can speak for a man, a woman for a woman, a black person for all black people, then we, once again, inhibit the spirit of theater, which lives in the bridge that makes unlikely aspects seem connected. The bridge doesn't make them the same; it merely displays how two unlikely aspects are related. These relationships of the unlikely, these connections of things that don't fit together are crucial to American theater and culture if theater and culture plan to help us reassemble are obvious differences (p. 29).

In her work, Smith portrays characters who differ in both identity, gender, and ethnicity. She portrays characters of various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. These characters have a story to tell, and she, regardless of her specific identification as a black woman, accepts this challenge. We tried to do the same.

Both the Playwright and I took great care in addressing these issues in the rewriting of the script. Although I am unsure if the playwright and I have the same permissions to transpose stories in the fashion of actors of marginalized communities,

I feel as if we, too, should be able to represent characters artistically in the name of art.

Stereotypes

To say *What in the World?* presented stereotypes needs to be part of the discussion. True, there were characters one might see on the streets, and stereotypes were indeed present in the community portrayed in the production. Rather than only shedding unfavorable light on communities of color, it also shed truthful light on existing communities. To say it is not acceptable to portray a black homeless woman who has a mental illness is to deny truth. Some stereotypical characters are based in reality. As Sarah Jones, a solo performer who, in 2006, won a Tony Award for her play *Bridge and Tunnel* states in an NPR podcast interview,

> What is a stereotype anyway, you know? And I remember somebody asking me about well, you know… you don't want to portray, for example, a Latino person who's a domestic worker or, you know, an Italian American who's a cop. You can't do that. Why can't you do that? That itself isn't the problem. I think, for me, where it gets… starts to get tricky is when I'm assigning, uhm, you know, some kind of moral judgment on… oh well, if you do this kind of work, you must be a person who's limited or less than. That is where it gets tricky, or I guess it's only… it's just the oversimplification like stereotyping is about taking what's true and oversimplifying it in a way that seeks to oppress or marginalize a group of people.

Jones's statement is important because it justifies the perception of the wider community and U.S. societies. Society relates to stereotypes in a way that helps them make connections between identity and difference. As Jones reminds us, it is only in the assigning of a moral judgment on the characters or an oversimplification that marginalizes a specific group. The play did not aim to objectify, oppress, or

marginalize any group. Like the work of Smith and Jones, it intended to illuminate existing narratives about the plight of homelessness. With this new attention to society, people can think, feel, and reflect, and it gives us reason to take a look at our lives and society as a greater whole.

The Right to Represent

Because of the historical, societal imbalance between marginalized and privileged communities, it may be, as in the case of Smith and Jones, more acceptable for people of marginalized communities to step into characters of varied ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds. Smith and Jones, both women of color, often portray marginalized characters in their work. Because of their experience with various ethnicities and marginalized communities, it is, perhaps, regarded as more acceptable for them to step into these portrayals as it might be for members of the white population. Their specific identity seems to issue license for them to do so. As actors, they tell stories and portray characters regardless of the character's ethnicity or socioeconomic background. In their portrayal of these characters, they deliver powerful insight and essential storytelling.

Another prevalent artist who defies stipulations is Danny Hoch, an award-winning playwright perhaps best known for his play *Jails, Hospitals, and Hip-Hop.* Hoch often portrays characters from the communities of New York, where he spent his youth. "My philosophy about being an actor is that you're supposed to reflect what's happening in your world," states Hoch. *What in the World?* attempts to do this.

It reflects what is happening in the world, specifically the homeless community. It reflects the period in which we live, a period of strife and difficulty.

Tensions

We cannot ignore the issue of identity, both ethnic and cultural. Smith states, "In these times when we are rethinking cultural identity, I am interested in the difficulty people have been talking about race and talking about difference. This difficulty goes across race, class, and political lines" (p.41). These differences in identity serve as a crucial part of *What in the World?* Smith's statement could have been a subject of discourse following our production and speaks to the many varied characters of the play.

The explicit complaint made by one of the student protesters was that the play said nothing positive about people of color and that there was nothing good that came of it. Reflecting on historical representations of people of color and erasure of the African American experience, this is quite an understandable position. Perhaps an oversight of the protesters was that it was essential to give voice to these marginalized characters so that audience could use their experience as food for thought to challenge their existing beliefs and assumptions about these communities.

Talkbacks

It was evident some might take offense to the play's content, but it was also my hope that the material would provoke discussion. Unfortunately, this wasn't the

case following the performance. Knowing the voice of the protesters was an essential part of a more in-depth discussion, I reached out in an attempt to recruit at least two participants of the protest as research subjects for this research project, one of them being the lead female. Unfortunately, there was no response from either of them. This was detrimental to the play's ultimate goal of inspiring healthy discussion while shedding light on struggling communities across the nation. The possible participants sacrificed an opportunity to have a voice. Perhaps, they felt they had spoken their piece, and there remained no reason to engage further. This was a loss for both sides involved, as their opinions count, and their voices could have expanded the findings of this study.

Smith has created a great career in interpreting multi-faceted characters around the intersections of race and society in pieces such as *Fires in the Mirror* or *Twilight Los Angeles,* states,

> Post-play discussions were critical. It is part of the idea behind to 1) bring people together in the same room (in the theater) who would normally not be together, and 2) attract people to the theater who don't usually come to the theater. It was important, then, to hear what people said about the experience and important to have them know more about each other than they could gather from responses (p.38).

Smith's statement reflects my intended aim; however, the action of the protesters left the project unfinished. We, as a cast, looked forward to the talkbacks, to hear the audience’s ideas and questions, and we knew there would be pushback in some form. I looked forward to hearing people's visceral response to the piece and welcomed the opportunity for discussion, which may have enriched the entire

experience of all involved. However, there was no chance for dialogue. If the participants who cared so much to shut down the production were then as equally brave to stay and have dialogue to discuss what they believed in. If at least one would have accepted my invitation to participate in this research, I think there could have been insight into the event. Because of the lack of the protesters' voices, this study will be less conclusive than if I had been able to engage even one of them in my research.

My Goals as a Director

When speaking of art and her work, Jones replies, "As far as I'm concerned, the greatest art, the stuff that moves me the most, is the stuff that also inevitably makes you think about the times we live in." This statement directly reflects my goal with *What in the World?* The comments of all the artists cited help me reflect on my work. It was not *wrong* to produce the play in the iteration we did. It was an opportunity to explore topics and some of the deeper issues regarding story, ethnicity, and representation. We aimed to provoke thought and discussion in the same vein as Hoch, Jones, and Smith.

Missed Opportunity.

Looking back on the events as they happened, it's essential to mention the missed opportunities, which, because of the lack of exchange and cancellation of the show, occurred.

The first and foremost missed opportunity was that of the actor/audience experience. As the show was canceled before the end of the first act, the audience never had the experience of viewing the entire production and being exposed to the issues and aims of the play. The full dynamic of theatre was lost. Not only was the audience robbed of its authentic experience of viewing the piece, but the actors were denied their experience of portraying their characters. Both parties were left with an unsatisfying outcome, one in which there was no opportunity for storytelling or catharsis. The exchange, which generally takes place between actors and the audience, was lost.

As a production, we missed an opportunity to tell an important story. We missed the chance to highlight the multi-faceted struggles of the homeless community. We missed the opportunity to show compassion, understanding, and empathy for the community depicted, which I'm sure would have been a significant portion of discussion during the talkbacks. Talkbacks would have allowed the actors to express their truths and their viewpoints surrounding the experience and the material, thereby experiencing a certain catharsis of their own. It would have also given the opportunity for the audience and the actors to discuss the problematic themes depicted in the play.

The Interviews

A vital element of this project was to reach out to student participants of the production and others within the community, in the hope of shedding light on views

of race and representation. I invited, via email, a group of approximately 15 possible subjects. The group consisted of a diverse number of participants in the production, protesters, and audience members, all of varied ethnic backgrounds. Unfortunately, not one of either the audience members or protesters accepted my invitation. The small pool of 3 respondents participating in this study, all of whom were participants in the production, is not significant enough to represent the ideals of a generation, but the views expressed may very well signal a shared vision. Once again, I state, without the voices of all prospective participants, this study will be less indicative of the protesters' motives or viewpoints, but more a representation of the cast members' opinions.

I interviewed a select group of students in their 20's, some identifying as white-passing, and others as people of color. Though several questions dealt with the experience of the production, the more pertinent questions address racial viewpoints. Though my sampling of student voices cannot possibly speak for the entire UCSC student body, it may undoubtedly reveal perspectives and insights of members of the Theatre Arts Department. The following responses[2] reveal the actors' viewpoints.

When asked about race as a social construct or an identity, Scotty, a student who identifies as white-passing, offered the following statement.

> I think it is very complicated. I think it is very complicated, race and ethnicity as an identity because there are many things that go into it, you know? The assumptions and values of society and the past, and especially during the 1950s. I mean people who were black were less than human, or people of color were somehow less deserving than white people or people of European

[2] To ensure clarity, the responses have been edited to remove repeated phrases, pauses, and excessive uses of "uhm", and "like".

> descent and, as time goes on, you know, you get a lot of different binaries, and the dichotomy of whether we should be calling ourselves multicultural or multiracial, and everyone has equity, everyone is equal. And then there's also the point, well maybe we shouldn't do that because that cancels out race as an identity, you know, we should, everyone should be equal, but in a way, they should also be unique.

Scotty's commentary not only shows that he's aware of sensitivities of the past, but that he remains sensitive to the current racial climate of today. Unfortunately, in light of current events, things remain incredibly complicated. We are still far from the equal treatment of communities of color. However, it is evident, Scotty's is not a collectively shared ideal amongst somewhat older members of society, including distinct members of our nation's police force. Separate binaries such as black/white, right/wrong, and justice/injustice continue to be an issue even in today's progressive environment. We can only hope for a better future where, as Scotty claims, "everyone should be equal, but in a way, they should also be unique."

I asked Lucy, who identifies as other, about the diversity of the UCSC student body or the Theatre Arts Department. They offered the following statement.

> UCSC is a predominantly white school. Like, almost everywhere you go, there's a lot of white people around, so I don't [see it as diverse]. People of color are very rare to see in large groupings unless you're going to those cultural events where you're going to expect large groupings of people of color. Yeah, I just think we have a, there's a higher rate of, like, white and Asian students on campus because we also have a lot of international kids apart from like having people of color and if you do see people, and the way our colleges are organized the different colleges also have a large group of one ethnicity, like Oaks [College], is usually where a lot of the people of color choose to live and then [College] 9 and [College]10 are where a lot of international students are. A lot of Asian American students live because they're all apart of stem so that I think each major also has their own groupings of ethnicities.

In response to the same question, Scotty said,

> I mean, some people question the legitimacy of our campus efforts to be racially inclusive and racially diverse because it's there, but I mean it ends up sometimes feeling, um, it loses its credibility the amount of white people in proportion to people of color here, right? I think it changes over the years. I have been a fan of rainbow theatre. I like rainbow theater, and I've seen a few of Donald Williams's shows. It's been great like last year when I saw *Crowns* and last year when I saw, or a couple of years ago when I saw *Raisin in the Sun,* you know that made me feel diverse and made me think and feel like we have a strong demographic of people from all ethnicities.

As universities across the nation are taking steps in being more inclusive, it is evident from the opinion of our theater arts students that the UCSC campus is predominantly white and that there are only certain areas in which people of color gather. This apparent lack of diversity signifies an ongoing struggle for inclusivity, equality, and equity among communities of color as they struggle for representation amongst predominantly white educational institutions across the nation.

When I asked Scotty about their viewpoint concerning distinctions made on campus between people of color they responded,

> When I was a freshman, when I kind of started to come here, I don't want to say I had a more conservative view, but I will say that I had a little bit more of a no-bullshit view. I had developed a kind of an aversion to political correctness and what I perceived as people taking things too seriously and then just blowing things way out of fucking proportion, and you know it's hard for someone like me to come, you know, to try and try and take a stance on some of these issues. It's been hard for me to take a stance on some of these issues over the years because, you know, I am a Caucasian person and it's hard not to step into the grey area or taboo of saying something that you know could be deemed racist or ignorant for a while. I've tried to just like to stay away from that. I'm, you know, in fear of risk, and there are multiple answers as to the ways that, you know, people of color are distinct. I want to say that some of it is self-imposed; not necessarily that's a bad thing, but I mean you know people always, through whatever medium, want to try and find a way to declare their authenticity and distinctness and, you know, in with race, and, especially in race, no people of the same ethnic background congregate together. They come together to be able to be represented, and you

> see that all the time, especially in art and in theater, of course. You know people come together where they have shared values and backgrounds to create something true to themselves.

In Scotty's statement, he has revealed a very mature sense of truth and evolution. Not only has he adjusted his point of view to align with diverse inclusivity, but he also states how it can be difficult for a Caucasian person to take a stance on the issues in fear of being perceived being as racist or politically incorrect. This fear of political incorrectness is something that even our more progressive and youthful generations face in light of the changing times. It is something that Caucasians and other white-passing citizens are trying to learn to navigate in an attempt not to offend but to impart a more sensitive, inclusive stance when addressing people of color.

To the same question, Smiles, who identifies as African American, replied,

> Well, there are [distinctions] because we have such a diverse population at the UCSC campus. Uhm, I don't think I have experienced too much of it. I know I chose to live at Rachel Carson [College], and I believe it was culture and cultural orientated, but I think the distinction is, I wasn't treated any different. I know, of course, there are more Caucasians on campus, so I was aware of that when I got there. But I don't think it ever affected me on a very personal level. At least I'm not subconsciously, but, yeah, I don't think I really experienced it.

Interestingly enough, we can see from the previous two responses; there is a variance in experience and opinion within both the Caucasian and African American students and communities. This difference can only just signify a disconnect between communities of color and white-passing communities on campus. Each, in their own right, experiences these distinctions differently.

When questioned about the younger generation's oversensitivity or lack thereof to racial issues, Smiles offered the following viewpoint.

> Um, I think, I think there needs to be a balance. I think I find some people a little bit too sensitive, and I find others to be not as sensitive. I kind of see it as me like in these circumstances with the show. I sometimes think as, like African American people who have dealt with like slavery and stuff like that, I think it's still lives within us even though we haven't lived in that time. So, I believe sometimes we become sensitive in that way it kind of be overly sensitive when it's not really what it is, but also find people who are very ignorant to certain cultural situations and they can be completely insensitive to how we have to deal with our pain after, you know, thousands of years, I mean, yeah, about hundreds of years coming from like today so, I think, I think people are [oversensitive] both sometimes depending on like your experiences in circumstances. But, yet, I think this generation is insensitive and sensitive at the same time.

Lucy replied,

> I think this generation is more racially aware of historical because we learn about history. We learn about the things that happened in the past, and so, with that knowledge, it's, we become more aware of what's happening in our own communities and our own friend group settings and how we treat one another. So, I don't think it's set like sensitivity. I think it's more of awareness of knowing when you're doing something wrong or when you said something wrong to a certain group of people or to a certain person that could literally be your friend, or it could be a stranger on the street.

Both Lucy's and Smiles's perception of the issue constitutes a healthy and mature attitude on the state of racial views today. Their statements allude to the fact that there are still strides to be made where sensitivity to racial views is concerned. Whereas we hope to strive for equality and equity amongst all communities, there have been incidents where people respond in a manner that may outweigh the circumstance. It is a tricky balance that we, as a society, should strive to achieve. I believe that our experience with the protest during *What in the World?* is a perfect

example of a time where a healthy balance of both leniencies, understanding, and social justice may have been useful.

Smiles also addressed their view on their generation's, as opposed to older generations' views on race.

> I do see a lot of people from my age range really fighting for other people to be equal with our ethnicity, but it is like it is. The same hurt is there. I don't think the hurt ever changes. I feel like the way I know how to deal with racial issues is a little bit different. The world, the world is continuously evolving. Um, like the hurt will always be the same, but I think we'll go about it in different ways.

To the same question, Scotty replied,

> I think people are back in to engage with it more critically, you know. It's kind of just the public unspoken consensus that race is not what we thought it was in the past and, um, naturally you know in today's society, I think a lot of people are forced to be aware of that, um, not only when a white person is, you know, interacting with another person of color, but just anywhere. You know it's people are more critically engaged with them, how it can be, and you know, because of that, I think everyone in ways always wants to defy the status quo, and that's where a lot of ignorant people come through the movement to understand race more fairly. People don't want to do that because they feel like that they're being forced to come along this sub-bandwagon of liberal ideology, and I think people are kind of pushed to the edge that, today, they kind of have to choose where they want to go with this; some concept in our society that just cannot be ignored any longer and before it was more of a simplistic thing we didn't understand it as critically, but now we are trying to.

I've have included all three student respondents' voices, revealing a similar view on the topics of race and representation. Though the respondents may view race differently than some members of previous generations, they express progressive viewpoints both on race and ethnicity.

I also asked the participants about their individual experiences with the play. Their answers varied, as did their experience. Some found it problematic, while others had fewer issues of which to complain. Though their collective responses resonated with me because of our shared experience, it was not my intention to have them dissect the production but rather to provide insight into their views on racial sensitivities.

I'll include both Lucy's and Smiles's response to whether or not they felt the playwright overstepped any boundaries. Lucy replied:

> I think it was nice to have the playwright in the room for the first few weeks of rehearsal just so that we could ask questions and get clarifications on our characters and how what he meant by some of the lines that were written. But, after that, once we were done with script analysis, as actors, I think it was more so like he was sitting there. We felt like we were being watched when we should have had the creative ability to just do, and so we were, I felt, more so constricted to how much I could put into the character because the playwright was in the room. I didn't want to over-exaggerate or do too much from probably what he meant the character to be, and so, there wasn't enough room to play.

Smiles offered a different take on the same question. They responded:

> I think you can answer this in two ways. If you're talking about like writing in general, the script and how people felt about what was in the script and then just, you know, just him being in the rehearsal process. I think those are two different separate answers. I think because I talked to him about the situation, just trying to get inside on his mind on why you wrote it and stuff like that. I believe that he didn't overstep it but, then again, I'm not as much as knowledgeable when it comes to social and cultural issues on who should be writing what and I understand that. But I really don't fully understand that. But, just by my intuition, I don't think he wanted to do harm at all. I think he just wanted to bring light to these issues that some people can't handle, and that comes back to like the sensitive question. I think some people are very sensitive and not ready to talk about these issues. So, I think that's why the uproar was so big.

The different ideas expressed in the previous two responses were indicative of the cast's varied experiences with the show though each reaction and experience varied. I felt it essential to include at least a couple of answers regarding the experience of doing the show.

The Playwright

The playwright, who had a strong presence during the rehearsal process, had strong feelings about the entire process. He was affected by the creation, the process, and the protest.

To author a piece of this nature takes a brave soul, a confident character, a keen observer, and an informed individual. Dealing with such sensitive content and controversial themes forces one to ask: Who has the right to say what? Is this right something one earns, is entitled to, or something reserved only for those who identify as part of the community which one describes? Are we, as artists, meant to be bridled by the constructs of race, belonging, and membership? I believe we are entitled to artistic freedoms expressing our creative endeavors. We are meant to exercise artistic license in our observations of reality, yet we must also remain sensitive to the current racial climate.

In my first meeting with the playwright, a student in his early 50s, he told me he had ample interaction with the homeless community and that his girlfriend, whose life story inspired the play, was a woman of color. He intended to depict a human

story, and though a portion of events were based on real-life events, others were fictional.

I approached the project with a sense of both excitement and anxiety. We discussed the fact I, too, had personal experience with the homeless population in my area. I assured the playwright I would do my best to bring this story to life.

Following the protest, I knew the playwright's voice would be a vital part of the research. I chose to include a portion of our interview to give him a platform from which to describe his experience. I did not want to let him go unheard. Hopefully, his answers will shed light on the production from his point of view. I asked him, "Can you briefly describe what this project was for you?"

> PW: Well, for me, it's like, it's for you. It's, it's different because I write different things. But, most of the stuff I write that I enjoy is, is personal in nature but that it comes from some aspect of real-life or my real feelings. It's not just some sketch comedy thing or something, right? You know there's this feeling in it so, there's like a lot of my issues and things that I care about, I put into it because it's also my first play, so there's, you kind of put in a lot of what you're going through, what you're thinking of. So, I took the cancellation of the play very personally because I felt there was also a rejection of me. I feel really bad about, or angry about is, the actors betrayed me and betrayed the production and quit.

As a fellow artist, I can sympathize with this response. Our creative beings are powerful yet vulnerable as we attempt to invest our true selves and our whole hearts in every creative endeavor. As the playwright stated in our first conversation, he assured me that he had experience with the homeless community and that he had been consulting his girlfriend on issues of racial matters and other aspects of his writing. Even though partly based in truth and partly based in fiction, the story was complex and encouraged thought and reflection. I'm sure that, in creating this piece of art, he

invested his real heart and creativity, and I can understand how he might have taken the cancellation of the show personally. I hope that over time, he can see this as the decision of the cast not to continue as a decision made in the interest of their well-being, and not as an aggressive step intended to offend him personally. I asked him, "What did you mean to convey with this play?"

> PW: That we are all, we are all alone at some time, you know? Where it's safe distancing, everyone understands what it's like to be alone. But Millie and the homeless people are out alone like out on the streets in front of us. They're not in their homes. They don't have homes to be alone in. They're dealing with all their stuff. It's all public, right? It's like being famous in a way. You're living your life in front of the cameras. They're living their lives their most intimate parts or lives in front of everybody. I wanted people to look up on stage and see the people they usually walk past and say, well, I like that Millie, I like her, or I like him, you know, I'm Cornelius or whoever. You kind of feel like you have feelings. I wanted people to be emotionally invested in it, right. And so, I thought that was really important that you, what happens when other human beings that aren't in our social circle or whatever, how do we, it's not like at a party and someone you don't talk to, how do we walk by people whose lives are kind of slipping away? And what does that say about us?

His intention to illuminate the issues of the homeless community was a gallant effort to bring this issue to the attention of viewers. Those fortunate enough to be surrounded by loved ones, with a roof over their head, can quickly turn a blind eye to this community. So often, as people go through their daily lives, they tend to either ignore this community entirely or, perhaps, experience discomfort in their interaction with them. I see this endeavor as a challenge to do better. I view it as an additional example of Elam's reality check in the same sense that what is real versus what is representational can cause reflection and encourage action. I asked, "How did you view the process?"

> PW: I just wanted to learn all the different aspects. I actually took [Department Chair David] Cuthbert's production class during the summer before, so I would not be wholly ignorant about what people are talking about, so I wouldn't have to ask a bunch of stupid questions. I know, OK; this is set design, so, just whatever. I didn't want people to have to run it past, and I wasn't going to make those decisions. I wasn't. I wasn't sure because I just said oh these are your ideas and I just go oh great and if maybe give a little note about what I think about it but it's, again, it's my play. I want to be able to write my own play. I want you to be able to direct the play. I want the set designer to be able to design it without people looking over them and doing their jobs for them, you know, to give them the means and the encouragement and whatever and let people do have their own because I know how it so it's important that we create a piece of art or we create anything we do anything collaboratively. I felt like that kid. I felt like Millie in a way, right? People were looking past me, you know that I walk into the theater and other than [cast member] feels like this, make this thing that everybody else kind of like avoided me or avoided eye contact with me. I'm just going, you know, what the fuck? And, then I also heard people, you know, those people are sad. I thought we did a great job, and you did a great job that's something to be proud of. You should be proud that your students are capable of this type of work.

If I can cite anything in this response, it was a genuine desire to be part of something collaborative and creative. I believe this is the reason the playwright felt such a strong desire to be part of the process through opening night. One can certainly understand the excitement of having your first play produced. The excitement of having your art or creation translated onto live bodies in action must have been thrilling. I know that, as a first-time director, I welcomed the presence of the playwright because I knew that he would be able to share insights with the actors, ideas of which I might not have been aware. I asked, “How did you view, or what was your perception of the protest?”

> PW: Well, I thought it was, at first, I'm like, oh some black people showed up to see my play and like they're a little late, but I'm, I'm glad that they're here, and then they started taking over. I'm like what the fuck is this, my chest is,

> my heart racing, and then I turned to [Production Advisor James] Bierman, and I said, 'Well look. I guess we got it we got a thing on our hands here', like, this is great, right because there are only 10 or 12 people in the audience then they'll be a lot more tomorrow night now that this happened, right? Now people want to see what this is about was so controversial. And, no, it's not a racist play, so I don't, I don't have any problem with that at all. I wrote a play to deal with issues of race and all that stuff. When I talked to the black student union[3], people, they said, yeah, we actually support this play and everything. We don't like the one line because we feel there are millennials black or white or very touchy about it, just a bunch of stuff, and they understand like that provocative statement. It's not me saying that right. I don't feel that way it's trying to deal with when someone says something like that. How do you handle it? How are these two guys in conversation…handle that kind of a thing, especially when the guy doesn't take credit for it, right? So, it was one of those things that someone says to be provocative or to be kind of an asshole or whatever, and then how do we, how do we talk about race and how do we deal with that matter? We make it better.

The playwright had high hopes for the continuation of the play following the protest. He was encouraged by the activity, thinking that it would bring the play to the attention of a wider viewing audience. It was also my hope that the protest would be a springboard from which to reach a wider viewing audience and attract more attention. The protest certainly caused conversation within the Theatre Arts Department and, perhaps, across campus. Unfortunately, I have not been able to include the voices of the protesters, as this may have made the conversation far more interesting and conclusive. I asked him, "Do you feel censored, called out, or silenced?"

> PW: I do, right? So, like, when I got involved with the National Council on censorship and some other organizations that were going to advocate for me [in my playing] on my behalf came out like, well, it's not really censorship because it wasn't the school or the department that shut it down. It was the protesters and then the students' rights. But, to me, it was.

[3] Unfortunately, I am not informed about the content or discussion of the meeting between the playwright and the Black Student Union.

In a sense, I feel that we all felt censored. There was an undeniable sense of being "canceled" and "called out" for having committed some type of moral crime against people of color. Though the cancellation of the remaining performances was a decision made by the cast, it left the voice of the playwright silenced. I asked him, "Art often provokes thought. Do you feel that we were successful?"

> PW: Oh yeah, absolutely and certainly would have been more successful, and that's …the protesters should have gone to the play, get all pissed off you want, and then come back or do come back to the talkback. You don't even have to come and sit through it again come back when we have to talk back and say what your issues are.

The lack of conversation following the protest was one of the play's most significant missed opportunities. It was also a missed opportunity for the protesters to concretely voice their issues and concerns over the play and issues at UCSC in general. As the director, I would have welcomed the opportunity to engage in discussions about how the audience perceived the play, what the offenses were, and how they could have been resolved or handled differently. I do not apologize for the story, but I do believe that there would have been a vital conversation had if all the parties had participated.

Conclusion

In retrospect, my experience with *What in the World?* has changed my approach to my work. I have become a more empathetic and passionate Director. By referencing theorists such as Crenshaw and Elam, and artists such as Smith, Hoch, and Jones, I have a greater understanding of what it means to be able to tell difficult stories. *What in the World?* reminded me that words matter, people matter, and questions of representation, embodiment, and permission matter. It is important that, as creators of theater, we continue to remain sensitive to these topics. We must also continue to consciously tell difficult stories.

The issues raised from this experience serve as a microcosm of a much more significant problem currently plaguing our nation. The current racial climate, apparent in riots and protests occurring across the country reveals that it is evident that questions surrounding the topics of race and representation are still highly significant. There is still a need for progress, still need for change.

I more clearly understand the dilemma of those who have to fight for equality. I stand with those who continue to fight for justice. I have learned where there is room for art; there is also room for compassion. It was, perhaps, the plight of the protesters to take a stance and move in the direction of achieving justice and equality on the UCSC campus. They did the only thing they felt they could do, stand, and let their voices be heard. Though their voice remains absent from this study, the plight of people of color rings loud across the nation. The struggle is far from over.

Appendix A – The Participant Questionnaire[4]

1. What is your ethnic heritage?
2. What are your views on race (as a social construct)?
3. What are your views on the distinctions between people of color on campus? Do you think this reflects the larger cultural climate?
4. Does UCSC represent a culturally diverse population?
5. Do you feel that people of color are treated differently on campus? If so, how?
6. Have you ever experienced racism on the UCSC campus and, if so, how/ in what form
7. Do you feel that today's younger generations (iGen) are becoming too racially sensitive?
8. From your experience, how would you say that your generation views race as opposed to previous generations?
9. Was there anything offensive about *What in the World?* And, if so, what was it?
10. How did you navigate your experience with the play?
11. Were you aware that the playwright's partner was a woman of color? Were you aware that some of the events were based on her life story?
12. What were your initial reactions to the script?
13. Was the playwright overstepping any boundaries?
14. Would the play have been perceived differently if it had been written by a person of color?
15. At any time after the protest, did you feel that you were going to be viewed differently?
16. Do you feel silenced or censored in any way?

[4] I may not have asked all questions.

Appendix B – The Interviews[5]

Lucy

1. What is your ethnic heritage?

> I am Filipino Hawaiian. My dad's Filipino and my mom is Hawaiian. There's also, like, a whole bunch of other stuff in there, but that's those are the two main ones that I identify as. Um, if the question ever comes up like when people ask like what, like, what your ethnicity of like what your background your cultural background I usually just say I'm Filipino Hawaiian they go oh that's cool, I thought you were Mexican or whatever because like Spaniards and stuff like that.

2. What are your views on race, perhaps as a social construct, or your views on ethnicity?

> Um, in high school, we had this one teacher or this one college professor who would say that race, we are all part of the human race, and if we really want to define people by their skin color, by their culture, you should be talking about ethnicity. So, I think that those are two very different things because as of race, we're all one thing. [inaudible]… humans and we can't help what we do as humans but as, like, ethnically with culture and stuff like that like where you grew up and how you grew up and around the people, you are with, it's it creates your own sense of individuality how you choose to interpret your ethnicity.

3. What are your views on the distinctions made between people of color here at UC SC if you have any?

> Um, you see, I see it is a predominantly white school. Almost everywhere you go, there's a lot of white people around, so I don't [see distinctions]. People of color are very rare to see in large groupings unless you're going to those like cultural events where you're going to expect large groupings of people of color.

4. Does UCSC represent a culturally diverse population?

> There's a lot of opportunity for cultural diversity at UC SC. However, I don't think the people who apply aren't as culturally diverse as the college would

[5] The interview responses have been edited for purposes of clarity.

want. So, it really hinders on the fact of the students admitted because there's um, there's, what is it where they have to admit a certain group of [affirmative action] as a primitive action? There might not be enough students who apply for that, like, who applied to UCSC to even like comply with the affirmative action of UCSC.

5. Do you feel that people of color are treated differently on campus?

Being someone who's not, and I can't speak for somebody who is and how they feel they are treated.

6. Have you ever experienced or been witness to any type of racism on campus, and if so, how and what was it?

I don't think I have been.

7. Do you feel that today's younger generations and, by that, I mean I'm referring to people that were born after 1995, who are commonly referred to as the I Gen. Do you think that this generation might be, or is becoming too racially sensitive? Why or why not?

I think this generation is more racially aware with historical because we learn about history. We learn about the things that happened in the past, and so, with that knowledge, it's, we become more aware of what's happening in our own communities and our own friend group settings and how we treat one another. So, I don't think it's set like sensitivity. I think it's more of awareness of knowing when you're doing something wrong or when you said something wrong to a certain group of people or to a certain person that could literally be your friend, or it could be a stranger on the street.

8. How does your generation (IGen) view race as opposed to older generations?

In America, a group of kids, my entire school was either Mexican or African American, so I grew up with a lot of people. Say there's a lot of people who were very aware of what they were and how they wanted to portray themselves. And so, I think, from my experience, in my own generation, with my own peers, it's, they will accept the things that make them who they are and that drive. There, sort of, like their personal view of their individuality, but then there are some things that are associated with their culture or associated with their ethnicity that they'll try to shy away from or either turn into a positive rather than a negative trait.

9. Was there anything offensive about *What in the World?* And if so, what was it?

Um, I know that this *What in the World?* was derived from Nick's story and his personal experiences growing up. Still, I think the fact that he centered it around an African American woman, which he isn't, just as a person, he's a white male so, to just try and center the story around a different gender and the different ethnicity was hard to grasp, even though he had people to reach out to and talk to about that experience and try and get information of what it is to be an African American black woman. It's still the way he tried to depict her and write her out. And then, with my character, there wasn't much character development other than we're friends. Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot, what was the main character's name? Millie? Yeah, my character is just friends with her, and her name is a very generic Mexican sounding name. There's a bajillion Marias because that's just how it is. Maria and Jose are probably like the most generic Mexican names that you can come up with on the fly, and our characters didn't really have that much development.

10. How did you navigate your experience with the play?

    I tried to come into the project with an open mind. During first read-through, we read through the play, and I thought, OK, this isn't as bad. I see my lines are pretty normal. The story moves fairly well, and there's enough work with, as actors, and ask people. But I was the… as we continued the production process and you kept going through rehearsals, it became more like I became more aware of how raunchy the lines were and just how some of the lines just weren't as good as the other ones. There are parts of the story that were really developed and in other ways and stuff like that. So, I tried to be very open-minded.

11. Were you aware that the playwright's partner was a woman of color?

    Was it a woman of color? I wasn't aware until we started tech so, once we got into tech.

12. What were your initial reactions to the script?

    Maria not having a lot of lines, which was OK because I'm a team player. I will support. I will play the supporting character, and I will play it well, but that was like my first reaction was that Maria wasn't like a character of substance. She was more there to help move the story.

13. Was the playwright overstepping any boundaries?

    I think it was nice to have the playwright in the room for the first few weeks of rehearsal, just so that we could ask questions and get clarifications on our characters and what he meant by some of the lines that were written but, after

that, once we were done with like script analysis, as actors, I think it was more so he was sitting there, and we felt like we were being watched when we should have like had the creative ability to just do and so, we were, I felt more so constricted to how much I could put into the character because the playwright was in the room and I didn't want to like over like exaggerate or like do too much.

14. Do you think this piece would have been perceived differently if it had been written by a person of color?

Judging by the fact that the protest was mostly women of color, protesting against the playwright, who is a heterosexual, white male, then I felt if it was written by a person of color, male or female it probably would have been like easier and easier topic to digest for that group of people because they would know that, oh this the playwright is from that ethnicity so they might have some experience or recollection of what this character is going through or how this character feels and that sort of thing. But, since it was written by a white male, it was more so I felt like the protest is more directed at him and how could he write a story for a person of color when he has when they thought that he had no business writing when in actuality he was writing it because his girlfriend happens to be a woman of color, and he felt inspired by her story and wanted to write about it. So, I think that if it was written by personal color, that protest probably wouldn't have happened. If it did happen, it wouldn’t have been a protest. It would have been more so like comments under people's breath or behind the persons back.

15. At any time after the protest, did you feel like you were going to be viewed differently?

I don't think so. I felt pretty comfortable like walking around campus be based on the fact that I never seen those women ever on campus beforehand so, it wasn't like I was going to run into them or any other people that were in the crowd. I didn't really notice because I recognize some people who were there, who were there that night and the next day or in the coming weeks, I would run into them and then they had no idea that I was even in the show. So, I, it wasn't like you really [were] impacted by the protests. I didn't really feel after walking around or existing in my space because, at the end of the day, we have to take it as an experience and use it for our own personal gain rather than turning it into a situation of fear.

16. Did you feel silenced or censored in any way?

I don't think so. I'm a person who likes to speak their mind. If I have a problem with something, I'll say it. If you ask me a question, I'm going to answer it. I can only answer things to the best of my ability and based on my personal knowledge and things that I've experienced so, if you want to ask me about something, then I'll tell you about it.

Scotty

1. Can I ask what your ethnic heritage is?

> My ethnic heritage is, I am primarily half Mexican and immigrated. It was actually from Germany and then mostly comes from my mom, so Grandfather is German as well as my dad's father, who is also German. But, both of our families lean a little bit more heavily like my mom's side is German, and I have a big Mexican heritage on my father's side. I mean, look at me. I am white, passing. I mean, I'm half Mexican. I would say that that is a part of my identity. I do have a strong Mexican background in heritage, and I'm proud of it. I don't think I necessarily need to say that I identify as a POC. I just feel like I don't want to go on that grey area. I don't want to say publicly or to other people that I'm a person of color, you know, because some, most of my genes come from my European side.

2. What are your views on race as a social construct, or your views on ethnicity?

> I think it is very complicated. I think it is very complicated. Race and ethnicity as an identity because there are so many things that that go into it, you know, the assumptions and values of society and of the past and especially during the 1950s. I mean people who were black were less than human, or people of color were somehow less deserving than white people or people of European descent and, as time goes on, you know, you get a lot of different binaries and dichotomy of whether we should be calling ourselves multicultural or multiracial and everyone has equity. Everyone is equal. And then there's also the point, well, maybe we shouldn't do that because that cancels out race as an identity. You know we should, everyone should be equal, but, in a way, they should also be unique. And, I guess what my answer is of my view on ethnicity and race as a social construct is, you know, it's hard to say. But, I do believe in, I am erring a little bit more towards the different, unique, but also of equal rights.

3. What are your views on the distinctions made between people of color on campus?

> When I was a freshman, when I kind of started to come here, I don't want to say I had a more conservative view, but I will say that I am had a little bit more of a no-bullshit view. I had developed a kind of an aversion to like political correctness and um what I perceived as people taking things too seriously. And then, just blowing things way out of fucking proportion and, you know, it's hard for someone like me to come, you know, try and take a stance on some of these issues. It's been hard for me to take a stance on some of these issues over the years because, you know, I am a Caucasian person and it's hard not to step into the grey area or taboo of saying something that, you

know, could be deemed racist or ignorant for a while. I've tried to just like stay away from that, you know, in the fear of risk. There are multiple answers as to the ways that people of color are distinct. I want to say that some of it is self-imposed, not necessarily that's a bad thing, but, I mean, you know, people always, through whatever medium, want to try and find a way to declare their authenticity and distinctness.

4. Does UC SC represent a culturally diverse population?

From what I've seen, the diversity definitely is strong but not too strong. It's like a mild sense of diversity. The demographic of this campus and, you know, we pride ourselves on that. Sometimes, I feel like I don't notice but, when I do, I feel like most of these people are white. You know most of these people are of like California identity, mostly Caucasian, mostly over European background, mostly white-passing. I mean, some people question the legitimacy of our campus efforts to be racially inclusive and racially diverse because it's there, but, I mean, it loses its credibility the amount of white people in proportion to people of color. I think it changes over the years. I would, I have been a fan of rainbow Theatre. I like rainbow theater, and I've seen a few of Donald Williams shows. It's been great like last year when I saw *Crowns* and last year when I saw, or a couple years ago when I saw *Raisin in the Sun,* you know, that made me feel diverse and made me think and feel like we have a strong demographic of people from all ethnicities. I mean, you know, we only really have one African American person that auditioned to my knowledge. I don't think I know why that is, or if it's just by trend and coincidence or if it's, you know, influenced by some other course. OK, well, that leads me into this spot that there have been these plays in the past years like *Raisin in the Sun* and *Crowns* last year. Even *Skeleton Crew* this year that had mostly people of color in the cast, right? I was surprised when I saw the *Skeleton Crew*. I was like, wow there are, there is a diverse amount of people who look colored. There's a good amount of actors of color, and I wondered with the department. I was like, why weren't these people showing up to audition for our plays? So, is there some sort of a disconnect between the Rainbow Theatre and the Theatre Arts Department? You know, I can't give a 100% confirmed answer. This is why I think like there's been a disconnect. There are so many, so much diversity in Rainbow Theatre and they didn't come to auditions.

5. Do you feel that people of color are treated differently on campus? If so, how?

I don't have a problem with this so much because, in ways, it makes me feel kind of safe. It's kind of just the unspoken, not unspoken rule, but just unspoken consensus that everyone is liberal and, ever since I've been on this

campus, I've had no fear of expressing my disapproval of Trump because it's so likely and so, you can easily expect that most people will agree with you. And, I think, in ways, I would certainly hope that people of color are aware of that and do feel protected. The general consensus is that everyone is a human being regardless of race or color and that they feel that they can express themselves and be, can be a regular human being without, you know, being differentiated. I think it's not really our intentions, but the fact of our population that gives off the impression that this is something that's internal and more institutionalized rather than voluntary.

6. Have you ever experienced racism on the UCSC campus, and, if so, how?

I did not notice. I don't think I've witnessed or experienced secondhand anything like blatantly or anything. I've never been walking in class, and I see someone yell out the N-word right. No, nothing comes to my mind.

7. Do you feel that today's younger generations, which is constantly, is sometimes referred to as the iGen, which includes people born after 1995, do you feel that they might be becoming too politically correct or too sensitive?

I am more politically charged. I think Bernie Sanders should be listed as one of the most politically influential people of all time because he was just so fucking honest about it. He was so fucking honest about the nature of class warfare in America, institutionalized racism in America, and, in certain places, on campus. I don't think; I think that, in ways, people have aired on that side. Many young people have overreacted or gotten really overly emotional, but their hearts in the right place, and I think, in order to really hit it on the head, you have to be as calm and collected as you can about it and engage with things critically. I think that the spark of political correctness in not only this country but on a whole bunch of college campuses like this one, you know, it's in reaction to the information age we have. We have the Internet. We have Google. We have access to so much archival documents or archival information that we're starting to learn and gain the ability to question what's underneath this system that we operate under; this axiom and you know political correctness is, in ways, the right reaction to that.

8. How would you say that say your generation might view things such as race as opposed to someone maybe in previous generations?

I think people are back in to engage with it more critically. It's kind of just the public unspoken consensus that race is not what we thought it was in the past and naturally in today's society. I think a lot of people are forced to be aware of that not only when a white person is interacting with another person of color, but just anywhere, you know. People are more critically engaged. I

think everyone always wants to defy the status quo and that's where a lot of ignorant people come through the movement to understand race more fairly. People don't want to do that because they feel like that they're being forced to come along this sub bandwagon of liberal ideology. I think people are kind of pushed to the edge that they kind of have to choose where they want to go with this. It's some concept in our society that just cannot be ignored any longer and before it was more of a simplistic thing. We didn't understand it as critically, but now we are trying to.

9. Was there anything offensive about *What in the World?* and, if so, what was it?

I think it was the way that the cops were written. One can say that it was really ignorant of the playwright to write the characters of color and then the people of color who were in the show, but the way that the cops were written. So, yes, a short answer, the cop scenes.

10. How did you navigate your experience with the play?

I thought about this, you know. Naturally, I'm someone who just, most of the time, has a lot of aesthetic distance. It's like my work doesn't, you know, that I don't typically involve it with my person. I'm not as emotionally charged with it. I mean, I tried to engage with it a little bit more logically and, I have to say, I don't think that I really started to grasp the severity of what we were working with until we had those discussions in meetings. You know, even before then, I remember I was reading the description of the characters before I had auditioned. It still came to my head like wow, you were gonna have to work with this 'cause this is very emotionally and politically charged. I mean, my character, I kind of just drawn from my own experience. Dealing with homeless people, I have plenty of experiences with that, and I have to say the nature of my role. I didn't notice I didn't constantly work with the text. I didn't work with the lines, and I think that might have been why I didn't see it as fully or quickly as a lot of other people. Eventually, I just realized as far as the end, like what is this play? Why are we working with this? This doesn't reflect our values

11. Were you aware that playwright's partner was a woman of color and that the events were actually based on events in her life?

I think the playwright mentioned that during one of our talks, halfway through the whole process. I gotta say, when I first heard that, I thought to myself, OK, well great, this is something based in, in reality, you know based off of an anecdotal experience. But, after a while, you just start to question that, and it's like, why didn't she write this? Why didn't she write this play? It's supposed to be an anecdotal experience, and you just feel weird knowing that it is based

off of a true story, but the playwright doesn't have the one first-hand experience as much as she does, and he doesn't have the experience and perspective to do these themes justice. That's why I think where it really just fell through.

12. What were your initial reactions to the script?

It took me quite a few read-throughs to fully get and understand it. I read the description and everything, and it was only scratching the surface for me. I remember talking to the playwright as I was waiting to go into general auditions, and, I mean, my first reaction was, alright, we're doing a play about homelessness. This story needs to be told because we do have a poverty problem. It does coincide with racial tension in America and California, which I'm pretty sure, I think this is based in Sacramento. But, over time, you just, you usually think about the lines a little bit more, and you think about the plot and the characters. You see shit wrong with it, the more that you really look into it. It's kinda like Rocky Horror where it just makes less and less sense every time you watch it. The dialogue was just awkward, and the themes were just, like, what are you doing, you know?

13. Was the playwright overstepping boundaries, in your opinion?

I've already kind of answered this but, you know, you can't write, you cannot write a graphic scene about a homeless woman giving birth in a dumpster and expect it, not expect it to be taken fairly, or expect people you know not to have a bad reaction to it.

14. Do you feel that the play would have been perceived differently, had it been written by a person of color?

I think the entire thing would be different. Of course, I mean, if it was written from the same story, and you read both scripts, you'd be able to see the connection. But I think just the nature of pretty much everything in the writing would be a lot different if it was written by a person of color and, you know, it's not black and white, pun not intended. I was, like, the playwright is a white guy, and that's why… it should have been written by his wife, who is a black woman.

Smiles

1. What is your ethnic heritage?

   I am African American. I'm proud to be black.

2. What are your views on race as a social construct?

   I think that we are the human race. I think we are [from] different parts of the world so that the necessity comes to a part that makes us different but, at the end of the day, we bleed the same, we have the same emotions, [and] we deal with the foundation of life the same way.

3. What are your views on the distinctions made between people of color on campus?

   I don't think I have experienced too much of it. I know I chose to live at Rachel Carson [College], and I believe it was culture and cultural orientated, but I think the distinction is, I wasn't treated any different[ly]. I know, of course, there are more Caucasians on campus so, I was aware of that when I got there, but I don't think it ever affected me on a very personal level. At least I'm not subconsciously… I don't think I really experienced it.

4. Do you feel that the use University of California at Santa Cruz represents a culturally diverse population?

   No, I don't think so. We could have had; I just didn't see a lot of people like me. I heard from some of my cast members and just based on the show that there are some, but they usually stay on a certain part of the campus where their culture is supported, so I didn't really see it on the Hill [Theatre Arts Department] at all. So, no, I don't really think so.

5. Do you feel that people of color are treated differently?

   No, I don't think I have been treated differently. I've been in interesting classes that we, our professors may just talk about race and stuff that in that way…not even really notice it affected me until we start talking about it, but I don't think I was treated differently at all. I think that sometimes my inner turmoil and just past history kind of makes us feel like we're being treated differently, but I don't think [so].

6. Have you had any experience with or been witness to or been a victim of any form of racism that you can identify?

   No, I don't think so.

7. Do you feel that today's generations younger generations, and by that I mean people who were born somewhere after 1995, that are commonly referred to as the iGen, do you think that they might be becoming too sensitive where racial issues are concerned or not sensitive enough?

   I think there needs to be a balance. I think I find some people a little bit too sensitive, and I find others to be not as sensitive. I kind of see it as me in these circumstances with the show. I think sometimes African American people who have dealt with like slavery and stuff like that; I think it's still lives within us even though we haven't lived in that time. I believe sometimes we become sensitive in that way it kind of be overly sensitive when it's not really what it is, but also find people who are very ignorant to certain cultural situations and they can be completely insensitive to how we have to deal with our pain after you know thousands of years, I mean, hundreds of years coming from like today. So, I think people are both sometimes depending on your experiences in circumstances. I think this generation is insensitive and sensitive at the same time.

8. Would you say that the younger generations have different racial views as opposed to previous generations?
   I do see a lot of people from like my age range really fighting for other people to be equal with our list of a necessity, but the same hurt is there. I don't think to ever change. I feel like the way [we] know how to deal with racial issues is a little bit different. The world is continuously evolving.

9. Was there anything offensive about *What in the World?* and, if so, what was it?

   I didn't know anything about the play or anything about the school and how the Theatre Arts [Department] did anything. I barely heard about auditions just by going to orientation. I didn't know what I was signing up for, but I think, as time went, and I started listening to my cast members, I understood the characters and stuff. I realized it kind of was offensive, and since the characters really represented as the way it was written. So, I think that was offensive, and it could have been a better way to go about that. I know other people said that the play itself was offensive, but I really didn't see any offensiveness. I seen that…wanted to bring light to these issues and was having discussion that's kind of how I viewed it. Maybe there was certain places [that were] inaccurate culture-wise, but if you look at it, I feel like the

intention behind the whole play that was written was very inspiring, and I think people should know about these issues.

10. How did you navigate your experience with the play?

    I focused on what I had to do. I didn't really see [what] other people had to do until we actually had a discussion about it with all of us on one rehearsal. I think I just focused on what I needed to do like the lines and just became so involved in this character. I don't really think that I had too many issues. I just focused on myself. I really didn't see that outside of it. I had to deal with some very hard things, and I don't think I ever got asked in my character. It did spark a lot of stuff for me, but it did to the point like just crying on stage, which is hard, I realized that was interchangeable, but no, that was just inner conflict that I had to get through. How I navigated through it was just me just focusing on my character and not like trying to interact with anybody else's character.

11. Were you aware at the time of participating in the play that the playwright's partner was a woman of color and that some of these experiences were based on her life?

    I believe, [at] auditions, I didn't know anything about any of the characters or any of the play. Just by reading my callback lines, I think I kind of had a little gist of who's going on, but other than that, I really didn't know at all. I think the first time, the first rehearsal, I believe we had our first read-through and I think the playwright basically said something about his experiences with the black community. I think he said it, but it went over my head, and then I noticed he continues saying it like when you [gave] him the opportunity to speak about the characters and where the writing came. Yeah, I had it pretty early on.

12. What was your initial reaction to the script?

    I ended up doing a whole audition actually to get into a show. I was kind of skeptic about doing this because so, like my first time being out of big University and away from home, which was just scary, and I just wanted to make sure that my academics were ok. So, I was kind of hectic going into a show, not knowing anybody, and just not aware of how the part is going to go. I emailed you. I was like, 'I don't know if I will do it.' I actually went into rehearsal … I absolutely loved the play that like it was talking about real stuff, and I like to [inaudible]… I don't know. As time went on, I started to here other people voices, and they were looking at the play a little bit differently, but I still never let go of what I initially think, so I think I started seeing a little

bit more raised issues and then, when everything kinda happened, it hurt me because I worked so hard. My reactions just were up and down throughout the entire process.

13. Was the playwright overstepping any boundaries?

    I think you can answer this in two ways if you're talking about like writing in general, like the script and how people felt about what was in the script, and then just you know just him being in rehearsal process. I think those are two different separate answers. I think because I talked to him about the about the situation, just trying to get inside on his mind on who wrote it and stuff like that. I believe that he didn't overstep it but, then again, I'm not as much as knowledgeable when it comes to social and cultural issues. …who should be writing what and I understand that, but I really don't fully understand that. I don't think he wanted to do harm at all. I think he just wanted to bring light to these issues that some people can't handle it, and that comes back to like the sensitive question. I think some people are very sensitive and not ready to talk about these issues, so I think that's why the uproar was so big. But, as far as in the rehearsal process, I believe that I've never been in rehearsal process at all until this time, so I heard from other people that like the writer is not supposed to be in the rehearsal room after rehearsing the first or second week so I didn't mind. I don't know. I didn't mind…. I'm supposed to act the way he wants to act according to like you the director, so it was kind of nerve-wracking and it kind of made me nervous.

14. Do you feel that the play would have been perceived differently if it had been written by a person of color?

    I think that certain people, I think if it was written by personal color, I think it would've have been perceived differently. I think some of the issues in the writing would have probably been looked over just because of the color of the person who wrote it.

Appendix C – The Playwright Questionnaire

1. Can you briefly describe what this project was for you?
2. What were you meaning to convey with this play?
3. How did you view the process?
4. How did you view the protest?
5. What was your hope following the protest?
6. Do you feel censored, called out, or silenced?
7. Do you feel that this generation that is commonly referred to as the iGen, which refers to people born after 1995, which comprises a lot of the student body at UCSC, is growing too sensitive or too politically correct?
8. Art is normally and often is used to provoke thought. Do you feel that we were successful?

Appendix D – The Playwright Interview[6]

1. Can you briefly describe what this project was for you?

   I write different things, but most of the stuff I write that I enjoy is personal in nature but that it comes from some aspect of real-life or my real feelings. It's not just some sketch comedy thing or something. There's this feeling in it so, and there's a lot of my issues and things that I care about. It's also my first play, so there's, you kind of put in a lot of what you're going through and what you're thinking of, so I took I took the cancellation of the play very personally because i felt there was also a rejection of me.

2. What were you meaning to convey with this play?

   That we are all alone at some time. Where it's safe distancing, everyone understands what it's like to be alone open, but Millie and the homeless people are out alone on the streets in front of us they're not in their homes they don't have homes to be alone in. They're dealing with all their stuff, it's all public, right. It's like being famous. You're living your life in front of the cameras. They're living their lives, their most intimate parts in front of everybody, and people just walked by. At some point, we can't stop with every homeless person ask him how are you doing today, you know, what can I do for you and the rest of us have people like that in our lives, you know, that can reach out to us and just say, 'Oh how are you doing?' Now there's a lot of people calling up people haven't talked to in a long time…. we're not working we're not doing this I just want to call up and say hi how are you and I've heard that people have renewed friendships through this social distancing because they felt like they needed to reach out. So, you have these people that are going through all these various problems, and they don't have anyone to reach out to them so much and just that that idea of like wandering, especially when you're a little mentally ill or you're hungry or whatever. How do they survive, you know, how do they keep going? A lot of people that would happen too and they kill themselves or something. I wanted people to look up on stage and see the people that usually walk past and say, 'Well, I like that Millie. I like her, or I like him. I wanted people to be emotionally invested in it.

3. How did you view the process?

[6] The responses have been edited for purposes of clarity.

I just wanted to be included, not to give my two cents on everything, but just to be there. I just wanted to learn all the different aspects. I actually took [Professor David] Cuthbert's production class during the summer, so I would not be wholly ignorant about what people are talking about, so I wouldn't have to ask stupid questions. I know this is set design, so, just whatever. I didn't want people to have to run it past me. I just said, 'Oh, these are your ideas, and I just go, 'Oh great' and if, maybe give a little note about what I think about it but it's my play. I want to be able to write my own play. I want you to be able to direct the play. I want the set designer to be able to design it without people looking over them and doing their jobs for them. I know how it's important that we create a piece of art, or we create anything collaborative you still want to have your [inaudible]… why am I on the board when no one pays any attention to what I have to say? I'm giving a different perspective here, which should be appreciated, whether it's right or wrong, at least it's different. I felt like Millie in a way. People were looking past me.

4. How did you view the protest?

Well, I thought it was, at first, I'm like, 'Oh some black people should show up to see my play. They're a little late, but I'm glad that they're here.' And then they started taking over. I'm like, 'What the fuck is this?' My heart is racing and then I turned [Professor James] Berman and I said, 'Well look I guess we got a thing on our hands here like this is great.' There are only 10 or 12 people in the audience, and then they'll be a lot more tomorrow night now that this happened. Now people want to see what this is about, what's so controversial and no, it's not a racist play, so I don't have any problem with that at all. Thursday following the protest, I went and met with some of the black student union, and I met with this other guy who's got some other roles. I gave them the play ahead of time. They read it. The only problem they had was the line of, 'you know, black people have the murder gene,' and I wasn't aware that there's like white supremacy activity on campus. People put up flyers occasionally or yell the N-word out of a car at somebody, and I'm like wow that's happening at UC Santa Cruz, I mean it's not that surprising. I don't know how big it is, it's just like, obviously, but that's just part of the world we live in. I wrote a play to deal with issues of race and all that stuff when I talk to the black student union people they said yeah we actually support this play and everything we don't like the one line because we feel there are millennials black or white or very touchy about it just a bunch of stuff and they understand like that provocative statement it's also it's

not me saying that right I don't feel that way it's trying to deal with when someone says something like that how do you handle it like how are these two guys in conversation and all that kind of a thing especially when the guy doesn't take credit for it right, so it was one of those things that someone says to be provocative or to be kind of an asshole or whatever and then how do we talk about race and how do we deal with that matter? We make it better.

5. What was your hope following the protest?

   Why didn't we just keep on doing it? I thought we would go back the next night and, like, why would we cancel if there's a protest? …. I would think that people will be excited now.

6. Do you feel censored, called out, or silenced?

   I do, right? So, like when I got involved with the National Council on censorship and some other organizations that were going to advocate for me, on my behalf, came out like what's not really censorship because it wasn't the school or the department that shut it down. It was the protesters and then the students.

7. Do you feel that this generation that is commonly referred to as the iGen, which refers to people born after 1995, which comprises a lot of the student body at UCSC, is growing too sensitive or too politically correct?

   It's hard for me to tell because I coached kids these ages. I was coaching them and teaching them before I came back to the schools. I thought I was so much more familiar with them. …. I write about controversial stuff, so we get these playwriting classes and then someone comes up and says, 'You know, maybe you shouldn't use the word Oriental' because I said like some one girl had this new play I've written. The one girl says, 'I wish grandpa would stop referring to my boyfriend as that Oriental kid', and that's grandpa speaking. Grandpa's not sophisticated enough to say Asian American, or you know you could say Chinese kid, but it uses the old phrase that we don't use anymore. It's funny that these 20-year-olds think that I'm the one who doesn't realize that I'm 30 years older than you, but I'm not 80 years older than you. I know exactly what I'm saying. It's like, 'Yes, that's why it says Oriental because he's politically incorrect. It's not me who saying that it's the character who saying that in order to differentiate between different people in different generations.

8. Art is normally and often is used to provoke thought. Do you feel that we were successful?

> Oh yeah, absolutely, and certainly would have been more successful… like the protesters should have gone to the play, get all pissed off you want, and then come back to the talkback. You don't even have to come and sit through it again. Come back when we have the talkback and say what your issues are. The thing was, after that protest, my girlfriend filmed it, and she was out talking to the protesters outside. Well, some of them were still yelling at me. That little girl comes up to me and says, 'I did make art my whole life and this is not art,' I went out there and this is the group over here why was like 90% women and two men. It's just typical men. They don't get involved like women will get involved. You can't really have protests without women. Women will show up. Women will sit in the square all day with a sign saying, 'where is my son?' you know the government kidnapped him or something. Men don't do that. So, you know, as you do need to have an effective protest, I do believe you need the involvement of women if not the leadership of women, but I thought was weird that it was like 20 women and five guys…. I went and talked to the protesters and everything that we were all connected, right. It's not a black and white issue. I want to tell my story and my stories about all of us because I don't really want to be interested in just my own story. I mean, I can do that in other ways. I wanted to tell our stories, but we can see ourselves in it, you know it's not about Luke Skywalker and all that stuff. I don't really see myself in Star Wars. I don't watch Star Wars for those reasons, or Harry Potter or something that's just a fantasy, which is fine too.

Appendix E – An Open Letter From Professor James Bierman

What in the World? was selected as the winning play among the scripts submitted for the annual Dharma-Grace Foundation playwriting competition by a committee composed of four senior members of the Theater Arts faculty. It clearly stood out among the scripts submitted and had the full support of the selection committee. The only consideration that was raised in our discussion of the script was that it was likely to be difficult to recruit the seven African American actors called for in the original draft of the script. That consideration was put aside for two reasons: the first was that the play was, in our consideration, clearly deserving of a production, and the second was our hope that this production might serve as a catalyst in increasing the participation of students of color in our program and our productions at UCSC in the future. Needless to say, we had high hopes for the production.

I hadn't met Nick Domich at the time I read his script, but I had the distinct impression that he was clearly familiar with the urban milieu depicted in the play. From my first reading of the script, I imagined that he had to be from Sacramento, where the play is set, and that he had some close contact with the homeless community there. Both of those suppositions turned out to be true.

Nick's depiction of the urban homeless community in his play is written with great authority, conviction, confidence, and a gift for finding the telling details of the poverty that casts its shadow over the lives of his characters. While there is ample room for pessimism regarding the effects of poverty on Nick's characters, *What in the World?* conveys a sense of uplift that I consider fundamentally spiritual in nature. In the end, the inhabitants of the world Nick created treat one another with kindness and compassion, along with a knowing appreciation for the restraints they are facing. The action takes place during the Christmas season, and the hope that characterizes that season lingers despite the sad realities and events of the drama. The two policemen and the hospital nurse who function on the edge of this impoverished world share in the supportive values that are expressed in the milieu of the play.

It appears to be a sad fact that the victims of the poverty depicted in *What in the World?* are disproportionately people of color, substance abusers, or mentally ill. These demographics are there in Nick's play, and they are mixed in with lightness and humor, no matter how oppressive they are.

What in the World? is a beautiful and engaging piece of dramatic writing, and there is much to be learned from it. I find it hard to comprehend what was in the minds of the students who forcefully closed down its production at UCSC, but I hope to enter into discussion with them over the issues that have so greatly animated them. Above all, I hope that one way or another, the play will get the audiences and the attention that it deserves – if not at UCSC, then elsewhere. At this juncture, my hopes for the present production are that it will be allowed to complete its run at UCSC and that we will be

able to have a thorough and civil discussion of the issues the play dramatizes. The strong reactions that the play has generated could provide an admirable learning opportunity for both students and faculty, and I hope that a forum can be found to take advantage of that opportunity.

I would like to add that the process of creating the current production of *What in the World?* has not been an easy one. The difficulty we experienced in casting the roles, the re-writing needed to accommodate the changes in the cast, the emotional demands of developing those roles, and the limited resources available for the production, all added to the complexity of mounting the production. What has resulted from the hard work of the play's cast and crew should serve as a demonstration of their dedication, their ability to overcome obstacles, and their faith in the play itself. Particular recognition should be given to Brian Carmack, the play's director, for his inventiveness and resourcefulness, and the energy he put into pulling this difficult project together.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chideya, Farai, host. "Actress Sarah Jones on the Bridge and Tunnel." *News and Notes* from NPR, 20 March 2006, www.npr.org/transcripts/5289456

"Danny Hoch: Crafting the One-Person Show." YouTube, uploaded by Backstage 2 March 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=SG5c5OWE0jo.

Elam, Harry J. "Reality Check." *Critical Race Theory and Performance*, The University of Michigan Press, 2015, pp. 173-197

Jones, Sarah. "Sarah Jones Thinks Stereotypes Are in the Eye of the Beholder.", *The Brian Lehrer Show.* New York Public Radio. WNYC. New York. January 4, 2016. Radio

"Kimberlé Crenshaw On Intersectionality." YouTube, uploaded by Southbank Centre 14 March 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DW4HLgYPlA

Smith, Anna Deavere. *Fires in the Mirror*. Anchor Books, 1993, pp. xxiii-xIi