

Janus, Skyla

Writing With Archives ENG 101-015

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Narrative Essay

What is an identity crisis? How could someone be so distraught to question their utmost defining factor, their identity? One's identity is all encompassing and should be embraced by an individual. As Oscar Wilde once said, "Be yourself everyone else is taken." Thus, upon viewing this exhibit I was drawn immediately to the large, bold, white writing which reads "Identity Crises" and grew curious as to what this phrase entails. The large, bolded, white font contrasted on the, otherwise empty, black background enlightened me that this phrase, the title, holds great importance in relation to the entire exhibit. Subsequent to reading the title, I was drawn to the smaller, less prominent text below the title, "Identity Crises", which read "Skyla Janus." Due to the positioning of the text along with the smaller size I concluded that this must be the name of the curator.

In addition to the aesthetics of choosing certain colors, colors are also associated with psychology and trigger different reactions. The color black relays a sense of sophistication, effectiveness as well as seriousness while the color white further emphasizes sophistication and purity. The use of these directly contrasting colors, along with a hint of turquoise, is consistent with the overarching theme of identity crises. The black and the white boldly reveal and

acknowledge the different perspectives of such internal struggles. The turquoise is meant to provide a sense of calmness, and light within the situation, to represent the mediation of the two strong opinions. Additionally, the use of the word “crises” as opposed to “crisis” implies that the curator will delve into the identity struggles of multiple individuals or a group of people not just an individual. This is important because it emphasizes that this is a societal, not individual concern. These notions, as well as the strategic use of geometric shapes, in combination with bold color choices sparked my curiosity to continue to explore the exhibition.

The complete turquoise background with white font provides a sense of calmness, cleanliness and purity in its introductory explanation for the exhibit. My eyes are first drawn to the larger and bolder text, “Exhibit” which informs me on what I will be reading about. It is evident that the curator is providing an explanation, or summary, of the exhibit as this centered text at the top of the page precedes the paragraph. From this it is obvious that through a collaboration of artifacts, texts and anecdotes of many different influential individuals the meaning of “Identity Crises” will be unraveled.

The exploration of one’s identity was sparked from the curator’s reading of *Funnyhouse of a Negro* by Adrienne Kennedy. This is because in this introduction, the curator begins by discussing and analyzing Adrienne Kennedy’s relationship to the protagonist of her novel. Adrienne Kennedy’s novel is a reaction to injustice based on race and gender from an inside perspective, she investigates the effects such accounts of injustice have on the affected individuals, and groups. It is evident that Kennedy alludes identity crises to the repression throughout society. The negative perception and disconnect with identity are first outlined in

Sarah, the protagonist's, alter-egos and dreams. The exhibit will then explore many disparate opinions on such injustice including the multiple feelings that prevail throughout the nation.

The white, reflective title, with fading shades of blue on the black backdrop with the arrows indicates the order of the exhibit providing organization and structure. This sense of structure provides the reader with an outline of the exhibit, guiding the reader, and maximizing efficiency. By outlining the exhibit, the reader will know what to expect allowing he or she to analyze all aspects of the exhibits to form stronger connections and opinions. The reader will essentially be taken on a tour of Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* then will continue to learn more about Adrienne Kennedy through a series of interviews preceding much artwork depicting different views of African American heritage. Along with the aesthetic appeal of the agenda, the use of the titles of the selected works sparks the curiosity of the reader. How could an exhibit begin using the word "negro" and end with a "festival"? This compelling factor encourages the reader to investigate further to discover to be informed of such connections.

The turquoise font of the title "Artifact 1", is similar to the blue cover of the artifact, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, complimenting each other. The paper of the artifact is stained and crinkled signifying frequent use of this artifact and indicating that the object has been passed down. The old, heavily used, unbound collaboration of stained papers is adjacent to a note signifying that the play was given as a gift to Emory University. Gifts are a gesture to show appreciation and enlighten the receiver on what was given. The note delineates the importance of the artifact which is also supported by the importance and significance associated with gift-giving. By providing the reader with a note, the curator aims to uncover the intimacy and

emotion behind the note and artifact. As we delve deeper into the exhibit, the curator provides an explanation of what is inside of this gift. The use of a beige background with black text combines sophistication and sincerity with the earthy, antique vibes associated with all shades of brown. The beige background also intends to mimic the effect of parchment paper to supplement the notion that the artifact is old. Likewise, and the black font could represent that of a typewriter, consistent with the antique theme. The use of this antique theme, provides context and aims to place the reader within the appropriate time period to more deeply connect and analyze the exhibit.

The summary provides an explanation of the protagonist, Sarah's, alter-egos and her strong desire to be someone aside from herself. Sarah desires to be a white male which is triggered by societal norms and her extreme identity confusion. This desire is evident within Sarah's dreams where she wishes to become someone that identifies with, according to Sarah, the white superior. Through these dreams and alter-egos, it is clear that Sarah is experiencing a colossal identity crisis to the severe extent that she hardly knows who she truly is.

As the exhibit continues, the plain black, sleek background with solely titles of interviews is enticing and provokes a mysterious vibe of what is to come next. The person exploring the exhibit is inevitably curious and eager about what will be revealed in these interviews with James V. Hatch regarding Adrienne Kennedy. This curiosity is sparked partly from the origin of her novel and partly from the aesthetics. The proceeding slide provides textual evidence of all that was dissevered about Adrienne Kennedy in these interviews. This information ranged from her childhood background, her experiences at The Ohio State University and her present day

accounts with racism. Again, the curator attempts to mimic the effect of parchment paper and a typewriter by utilizing this beige background with black writing. The use of the same background and font adds to the curator's consistency, providing a structured, coherent ground for the reader. Here, the curator discusses the content of the interviews.

These interviews uncover Adrienne Kennedy's childhood and past, revealing many of her encounters with racism. From these interviews, the audience learns that Kennedy grew up in a diverse neighborhood where racism was rare, thus her first real account with racism occurred at The Ohio State University where she acknowledged the concept of the white supremacy. Despite the racism she felt, Kennedy and her childhood friends stuck together, forming unbreakable bonds and supporting each other. This allowed her find her true self through watching and writing plays to express her emotions and opinions. It was at The Ohio State University that Kennedy discovered her passion for writing plays and, despite the criticism she received, she chose to pursue this interest. As Kennedy's story is unraveled and her connection to Sarah, who is disconnected from society, is made more clear with her experiences in college, the exhibit takes a turn to examine multiple works of art.

Artifact 4 consumes the entire slide with intricate drawings and designs by Camille Billops. The title "I am Black, I am Black, I am Dangerously Black," sparks much curiosity. The previous artifacts have focused on the negative perception of being Black whereas this title insinuates an immense sense of Black pride.. Along with the strongly worded title, this drawing is up for interpretation. A centerpiece represents a niche or the uniting bond of its entity. In this drawing, the centerpiece is of a woman, dividing the drawing into two clear sectors that represent

the progression of discrimination within society. Camille Billops attempts to defy stereotypes by centering her drawing around a woman, not a white male. This shows the reader that the previously mentioned racist circumstances are counteracted by perseverant women, like Camille Billops, that are brave enough to voice their opinions. The woman in the drawing is surrounded by a multitude of objects, symbolizing everyone's different opinions. The drawing is divided to have both, a red background with details outlined in black and a black background with details shaded in red. The woman in the middle serves as a unifying factor to connect the disconnected sides, or races, within America.

The shaded part could symbolize the dark times and obstacles faced by African Americans throughout the nation whereas the growth of flowers may signify progression. Contrastingly, the outlined designs could represent the light at the end of the tunnel. The design reminds of a yin-yang where is good within the bad, and bad within the good. The shaded side of dark obstacles seems to be shrinking and be overpowered by the growth of the outlined side. The growth of this outlined side, encompassed by flowers, is meant to signify the end of such injustice and the journey toward equality. As this piece of artwork sparks much curiosity, the curator utilizes the same parchment paper background to explain her overall interpretation of the drawing and remain consistent throughout. This interpretation includes similar situations that relate to the obstacles faced by African Americans and women. The drawing also, hopefully, signifies an end to this extreme inequality shown by the growing outlined side and disappearing shaded side. Within this artwork it is obvious that Camille Billops enlightens the audience on a completely different perspective of African American heritage, expressing pride as opposed to the previously discussed dissatisfaction expressed by Adrienne Kennedy.

The next artifact is presented on a black background, with white writing and parchment paper including an accessible link to the collection. The collection is a collaboration of photographs and artwork to reveal, yet another side of African American heritage, circumstances and stereotypes. At first glance, the black and white photographs emit a sense of authenticity and appear to have captured a candid moment. The people happily talking in a desolate area show that happiness can exist despite the circumstance, which is unknown according to the photograph. It shows that a woman could be happy despite the stance of society as long as she is surrounded by those who boost her individual self esteem. The conversation is evidently, intimate and lighthearted according to the smiles. Additionally, the black and white photograph of African Americans chatting while waiting reveals a sense of community for African Americans. The setting of the waiting room promotes a sense of anxiety, as waiting is inevitably associated with a certain degree of nervousness and unease. Though the cause of their togetherness is unknown, it is certainly evident that a sense of community exist amongst them. This photograph of these African Americans spending time together, commiserating, is an inspirational candid moment.

The Hatch-Billops collection cover shows that photographs emit many reactions and encompass many symbols. The photo of the angel and the devil splitting the page is a representation of men and woman based on physical, defining features such as their shoes and facial features. The cover of this collection is an acknowledgement of the present's struggles and the future's potential to alleviate these injustices bringing America together in a "festival". The word, festival, is usually associated with a celebration implying progression in the near future. The sketch within this collection aims to outline the stereotypes of the white male and all females

within society. The man is stuck in desk drawers, drowning in his work while the woman is confined to her beauty supplies and household chores. This represents a traditional couple where the woman is the caretaker of the house and children and the man works to support his family. These stereotypes and circumstances of African Americans are further analyzed by the curator.

This exhibit starts by exploring the disconnect and identity struggles within the African American community eventually leading to a different outlook of embracing one's heritage concluding with accounts of outlining the reality of it all. The curator provides further insight into each artifact and guides the explorer to what is to come next effectively utilizing a consistent theme throughout.