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A Proposal to Analyze One of Adrienne Kennedy's Plays Written During the Civil Rights Movement to Raise Awareness of Discrimination.

Introduction

Throughout history in the United States, discrimination has constantly been an issue. As a result, from 1954 to 1968, the Civil Rights Movement took place (Kolin 1). The Civil Rights Movement focused on fighting against racial discrimination in order to close the gaps between races. As one of the first African American playwrights, Adrienne Kennedy took the risk to write out her story in a play that was later released out to the public and became the center of attention. Being African American was not the only issue that bothered many during this time period. Women in general were also considered of less importance compared to men. They were typically inferior to men as the African Americans were to whites. For Kennedy, identity played a huge role in determining who she was and how others treated her.

As a biracial woman, she was not able to fit in, which triggered her to write a play called the *Funny House of a Negro*. Having to fight through several factors of discrimination, the playwright was still able to portray her troubles from her life through the main character of the play, Sarah, "The Negro". She had difficulty trying to accept her biracial identity living in the United States during the early 1960s (Kolin 1). She was unable to endure the emotional pain caused by the fact that her father is African American. The audience is able to see the hardships that people experienced during the Civil Rights Movement, but most importantly, what she had to deal with. She was able to clearly portray what it was like to be both female and biracial in the United States at the time. As she stated, "I know no places. That is, I cannot believe in places. To believe in places is to know hope and to

know the emotion of hope is to know beauty. It links us across a horizon and connects us to the world" (Hartigan 6).

To avoid this complication from continuing, a change or an attempt for alteration is necessary. This serves as a proposal to raise awareness of the cultural difficulties from biracial alienation and discrimination experienced during the Civil Rights Movement. This proposal includes written statements of what types of curated artifacts will come through in my exhibit, including my statement of purpose, objective, plan of action, and an annotated bibliography of secondary sources.

Statement of Purpose

Portrayed through Sarah, Adrienne Kennedy expressed the hardships she faced, one of which was her biracial identity (Hooks 1). She was not expected of much, but still had standards to satisfy, such as maintaining natural hair, which symbolizes the prejudice. Inequality in general has gradually become something natural in that people do not realize the way they distinguish, categorize, and discriminate others from themselves daily. That goes for both race and gender. This still seems to be the case nowadays due to some unresolved issues that have stayed unknown and unstated. There are many minor incidents being concealed, which I believe have acted as obstacles in resolving the complications.

The importance of this proposal for my exhibit is through my curated artifacts, which will address the stories of the playwright to allow the audience to come to a realization that whether or not someone is different in color, each individual is human and that they are not significantly different. Each person in this world has unique upbringings, which makes everyone unique, but not different. Biracial alienation and discrimination experienced during the Civil Rights Movement was a topic that was not taken lightly, which is the reason for the necessity of discussion. Many famous activists have shared their thoughts for their own specific reasons, but with the same result in mind. As simple as the idea may sound, not everyone acts upon it. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that it is possible to someday reshape the way we approach this issue in order to create a more collective and collaborative society.

Objective

Biracial alienation, the act of separating those with a mixed racial identity, is an ongoing issue that is to be discussed further. Although sympathy may somewhat be beneficial in terms of alleviating the unresolved case, my initial intention is to educate and inform others on the differences that may reshape our lives. I want the audience to be able to take away from this exhibit the idea that diversity rather tends to be more beneficial for us as a whole, just like Kennedy was able to do with the help of her play. Considering the limitations, I am aware that I cannot completely eliminate biracial discrimination, but I want to fill in the gaps that contain potential improvements that can be made for the betterment of our society. My hope is that there will be some changes whether it would be someone's opinion or stereotypes that people make.

Ever since the Civil Rights Movement, it is inaccurate to say that there were no improvements made, but alienation and discrimination still exists today. The stereotypes that people hold today, such as African American women wearing their hair in a certain way as did Sarah, may start to slowly fade away or at least change, which will eventually take on the challenge of settling the unresolved conflicts. As stated in the introduction, my intentions are to raise awareness of the cultural difficulties from biracial alienation and discrimination experienced during the Civil Rights Movement.

Plan of Action

My plan is to consult various types of resources, such as criticism, books, journalism, and archival materials. Each type of resource is unique in that it provides distinctive points, which assists my objective by providing facts, opinions, and diverse perspectives. For instance, criticism, consisting of scholarly analysis, provides specific or various view points and perspectives, whereas a book, consisting of a critical study or a literary work, would describe and give full explanations of social phenomena and historical events. In addition, journalism, consisting of newspaper articles, magazines, websites, and etc., shares a more objective stance, while an archival material would provide original details that are almost like a primary source since it usually is a textual, visual, or audible resource. Some tend to be more opinion-based, biased, or informal than others, which allows me to analyze and consider a variety of information. This is valuable because it helps me be more effective in satisfying

my objective of this exhibit. In order for my exhibit to be effective in raising awareness, it has to stand out, which is determined by the level impact it has on the audience. Two sources that I thought were comparatively adequate and used most were two of the scholarly/ academic journals: “Personal Perspectives on Adrienne Kennedy” and “A Fragile But Ferocious African-American Playwright”. They both provided numerous perspectives of the playwright’s characteristics, which ultimately supported my arguments in order to satisfy my objective of raising awareness.

On the other hand, I have I have rejected resources such as ethnography, oral history, comparative analysis, and popular culture for one reason. These types of resources are just not suitable, or at least did not work well with what I wanted to accomplish. It was mostly due to the reason that they are irrelevant or unnecessary in terms of my objective.

Annotated Bibliography

Harrison, Paul Carter, et al. "Personal Perspectives On Adrienne Kennedy." *Modern Drama* 55.1(2012): 90-99. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 2 Oct. 2016.

This scholarly/academic journal talks about the various perspectives of Adrienne Kennedy. It provides some background of Adrienne Kennedy, but it mostly focuses on the perspective of the writer on the playwright and her works. People who knew her personally provided opinions of her and her work. One thing in common that most people said was how they admired her work.

They mentioned how her work was rejected several times, but some people recognized her potential and her abilities. This resource provides various perspectives and opinions, which allows me to gain a diverse view on the playwright. However, it does seem somewhat biased since only the people who admired her shared their thoughts about her.

Again, in terms of applicability, this resource provided various perspectives and opinions, which allows me to gain a diverse view on the playwright and her works. It helps me gain a better understanding of her background, which explains the Sarah’s actions and emotional breakdowns in *Funny House of a Negro*. Furthermore, this essential information could help me provide more details in order to satisfy my objective of raising awareness.

Hartigan, Patti. "Adrienne Kennedy: A Fragile But Ferocious African-American Playwright." *Journal Of Blacks In Higher Education* 28.(2000): 112-113. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 2 Oct. 2016.

This scholarly/academic journal talks about the characteristics of Adrienne Kennedy as a playwright, but also as a person. It mentions how she seems fragile and weak, but turns out to be bold and ferocious because of what she does. She acts upon happenings that bother her during her everyday life, such as rejection, discrimination, racism, etc. She does not have to be the victim. Whether it would be someone she knows or not, she was able to portray the disturbances through her plays.

This resource is valuable since it gives spot on explanations of who she is as a playwright, although it may be seen as biased as well. Some may disagree on the statement that she seems fragile, but is actually ferocious and bold. Regardless, it still helps portray how her characteristics affected her decisions in creation of the play.

In terms of applicability, this resource provided details and information on what type of person she is and what caused the plays to turn out the way they are now. This helps explain why she said certain things through her characters in the play, which eventually could be added to my arguments in raising awareness.

Hooks, Bell. "Critical Reflections: Adrienne Kennedy, The Writer, The Work." *Intersecting Boundaries: The Theatre of Adrienne Kennedy*. 179-185. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 2 Oct. 2016.

This book of criticism talks about Adrienne Kennedy, the playwright, and her works. It does not specifically talk about *Funny House of a Negro*, but discusses the playwright's attitude and shares critical opinions. Overall, the reactions were positive.

This resource is valuable since it shares a perspective and criticism in a book. A book differs from a scholarly/ academic journal in that it has a more objective view on the author and her works. Although it does offer opinions, it is not like those of a journal.

In terms of applicability, this resource provided details and information that helped me gain more insight into Adrienne Kennedy's attitude and intentions as a writer that was expressed through her work. This clearly helps support my stance when raising awareness.

Kolin, Philip C. "American History/African Nightmare: Adrienne Kennedy And Civil Rights." *Contemporary African American Women Playwrights*. 62-82. London, England: Routledge, 2007. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 2 Oct. 2016.

This book of criticism is about the Civil Rights Movement and the struggles that went through during that time period. It also shares that facts about African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement in general, but also Americans and African Americans separately.

This resource is valuable since it talks about Adrienne Kennedy, the playwright, and some historical context, specifically the Civil Rights. It is straight to the point in that it tells us the background story of Adrienne Kennedy during her life while the Civil Rights Movement took place. It read nearly the identical facts as would a history textbook. It seems correct, but then again, history is not always accurate or objective.

In terms of applicability, this resource helps prove and raise awareness on the topic of African Americans, African American women, and Kennedy's struggles. This source is essential to my exhibit because it provided historical context and details. It helped me make connections across the play, author, and historical events.

Young, Harvey, and Megan Geigner. "A Racial Concern: Adrienne Kennedy's Diary of Lights." *Modern Drama* 55.1 (2012): 40-54. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 2 Oct. 2016.

This scholarly/academic journal talks about Billie, the main character of *Diary of Lights*, who also resembles Adrienne Kennedy. It provides information about events that inspired her to write this during the Civil Rights Movement. In this piece of work, she was able to portray her troubles and complications with race. She was racially discriminated, which was her main concern. This journal talks about what her concerns were, why, and how.

Evaluation is simple for this resource because all it only provides the racial concerns that Adrienne Kennedy had during her lifetime, more specifically during the Civil Rights Movement. This resource turns out to be more useful because it allows me to not only look into Adrienne Kennedy and her play called *Funny House of a Negro*, but also *Diary of Lights*. It does not seem to be too much of anything; it does not provide too much, it does not provide too less, it is not biased. All it does is explain to the audience the racial concerns that Adrienne Kennedy had, which was shown clearly through *Diary of Lights*.

In terms of applicability, this resource helps prove and raise awareness on the topic of African Americans, African American women, and women alienation. This source is essential to my exhibit because it provided detailed analysis on the characters and the plot of the play, which helped me find a connection between all the aspects and the theme.