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Brooke Howton  
howtonbe@hollins.edu

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løvetann/tvntēli'on/beàrnan-brìde/paardebloem  
Decolonization Through Heritage  
by

Uisce Howton

Partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts in dance

Hollins University  
Roanoke, Virginia

May 2024

Director of Thesis: \_\_\_\_\_ Director of B.A./B.F.A.: \_\_\_\_\_

Tara Masimer

Jeffery N. Bullock



*Dedicated to—*

*To my Mother and Father, Grandma Flo and Grandpa Dale, and to Aunt Jean and Mindy. Your support has meant everything to me, and I hope to make you all proud.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & DEDICATIONS

I want to sincerely thank my professor, Tara Masimer for supporting me in this process, her suggestions and watchful eye helped me immensely. To my family, I want to give my gratitude for always being there for me even when times got rough. I don't think that I would have been able to make it through my degree without their caring words and warm hugs to calm me down in times of need. To Mackenzie "Mac" Jennings, Emily "Em" Jones, and Anya Newman; thank you for hearing my late-night talks about my thesis. I know you probably just wanted to go to sleep or talk about something fun, but instead you listened to me and gave me your perspectives. This informed my process more than you could ever know.

Thank you to all of the teachers that I had the opportunity to dance with while at Hollins. To Melinda "Mindy" Rawlinson, Tariq O'Meally, Janice Lancaster, Rebecca Lillich Krüger, paris cyan cian, Sean Nguyen-Hilton, and Todd Rhoades; thank you for your mentorship both in and out of dance classes. My work is little wisps of each and every one of your contributions to my body of movement. You are my dance history.

To Jeffery N. Bullock, thank you for giving me the opportunities that I would not have been able to get anywhere else. The hidden gems of the dance world that I got to witness, and experience are because of the work that you do. I gained new perspectives from your words and guidance throughout my four years at Hollins.

To my ancestors, I hope I either make you proud or piss you off.

Momet mvto cekicis cē // Ceud mīle taing

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Throughout my whole life, I have been fascinated with genealogy and ancestry. Most of my research began when I was about twelve years old when I gained access to the Ancestry.com tree that my grandmother had been putting together for about a decade. This made my mother's side of the family relatively clear to see. My grandmother put in a lot of work and took the time to figure out most of our family history *way* before I was ever born. Her family is Scots-Irish and Muscogee (Creek) with a little mix of German (at least according to her maiden name). My grandfather had a family tree book that went back centuries. According to it, his family is English, Scottish, and Dutch. As a result, there was never a time in my life that I didn't know this part of my family. I could ask my mother questions about them, and she usually had the answer.



Figure 1: James, Dale. Personal photo. Grandma and Mother, 1971

However, my father was not as fortunate and wasn't always able to placate my curious younger self. My grandmother was adopted, and the person that I thought was my grandfather was not my *biological* grandfather. Since my father is a redhead, he chalked it up to being of Irish or Scottish descent and didn't look into it any further. It was because of this disconnect that I had asked for a DNA test for Christmas in my sophomore year of high school. Through this I was able to find some of our ancestors and expand his family tree. This confirmed that he was indeed Irish *and* Scottish, but also revealed that he was of Norwegian descent as well. However, this discovery did not clear everything up. It certainly helped me in my research on my grandmother's family since I





Figure 2: Personal photo. Father, Grandfather, Grandmother, and Aunt, 1987

had *some* names associated with her, but my biological grandfather is still a big mystery. We simply do not know who he was and everyone that we could have asked is now long gone. My father has confided to me that there was a point in his life that he was curious and that he was going to ask his mother, but she passed away before he could. After her death, he lost interest and the subject seemed to cause more pain than what it was worth. Even so, my

nonbiological grandfather was a prominent figure in my life whose family me and my father had some connection with. As a child, I included my grandfather in my research, and I still do. Even though we don't share blood, the experiences that we had together are enough to be cherished. However, since his passing in 2018, we have become estranged from his side of the family, so my connection to them is ever fading.

As briefly mentioned before, I have been doing genealogical work years before I even began to *think* about my thesis, and this aided my research process. However, it was in the second semester of my junior year at Hollins University that I began to think about what I might need for my thesis process. Though, I still was unsure of what *exactly* was my thesis topic. I just knew that I wanted to work on the theme of heritage and community. It was then that I took the whole summer to gather up all of the family tree information from over the years and condense it for clarity's sake. I recounted family stories and I wanted to make sure that I had the information straight. I gathered census documents, marriage certificates, and newspaper articles and compared them to historical

timelines to get a better picture of my family’s history. As a result, I found some notable pieces which eventually became invaluable to my research. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, I had an ancestor who received a paystub for working for the Muscogee Nation as a translator in which I found in the Digital Library of Georgia. I also located the digital version of the Dawes enrollment packet interview for one of my maternal great aunts. Briefly, the Dawes rolls were a list of people who were accepted as tribal members into one of the “Five Civilized Tribes “; this included the Cherokee, Muscogee (Creek), Choctaw, Chickasaw, and the Seminole. Once on this roll, the members received a small allotment of land which was done in order to break up the communal lands that these tribes once held in what is now known as the state of Oklahoma.<sup>1</sup> Since my great-great grandfather is listed on this roll, my grandmother, mother, and myself have always been eligible for tribal enrollment to the Muscogee (Creek) Nation.

Dawes' Roll No.		NAME	Relation-ship to Person Named	AGE	SEX	BLOOD	Year	TRIBAL ENROLLMENT No.	Name of Father	Year	TRIBAL ENROLLMENT OF PARENTS	Name of Mother	Year
3146	1	Jacob Biddle		39	M		1890	22	Jacob Biddle	1872		Mary M. Biddle	1872
	2												
	3												
	4												
	5												
	6												
	7												
	8												
	9												
	10												
	11												
	12												
	13												
	14												
	15												
	16												
	17												
	18												

Residence: Creek NATION. CREEK ROLL. Card No. 973  
 Post Office: Mounds, Ind. Ter. Field No. 976

ENROLLMENT OF NPS. 3146. PERSON APPROVED BY THE SECRETARY OF INTERIOR March 12, 1907

No. 1 on 1890 roll as Jacob Biddle. on 1892 roll as Jacob Biddle. for child of #1 see N.B. (1/26/06) card #354

Citizen's Certif. Issued Oct 16 1899

Date of Application for Enrollment Oct 16 1899

Figure 3: Great-Great Grandfather’s Dawes Enrollment Card, 1907 Enrollment for Creek Census Card by Blood 973. 1907. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/263788>

<sup>1</sup> Debo, Angie. 1979. *The Road to Disappearance: a History of the Creek Indians*. University of Oklahoma Press, 322

Another piece of information that I found was the specific region in which my paternal grandmother's ancestors lived in for centuries. It wasn't until the 1860's that they decided to pack everything up and left Norway to head to Iowa. And though I don't exactly know why they moved, I am happy enough to know where their identities and where they came from. Through this work, I became more knowledgeable about different histories throughout the world, but I still had no clue of what my thesis topic was going to be. I didn't want to make a piece just about my heritage, I wanted to make a work that made a statement in a greater context.

Inspiration struck in the summer of 2023 where I came across some videos discussing some of the ways to dismantle White supremacy. One of these discussions talked about what could happen if European-Americans (most commonly known as White Americans) attempted to reconnect with their heritage in order to begin to not uphold the concept of Whiteness.<sup>2</sup> Many different people that I engaged with online saw this as a great strategy, since it combats the “blankness” that Whiteness represents and brings people together through community and solidarity. Initially, I saw this as only being possible through heritage reconnection, but I found that many communities throughout history have come together and created a new culture through specific commonalities or shared experiences. Keeping this specific idea of “community” in mind during my research then helped me discover avenues that furthered my process.

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<sup>2</sup> @Clearlyclose. “Being Irish American.” TikTok , 28 Dec. 2022, [https://www.tiktok.com/@clearlyclose/video/7182361296388754734?\\_r=1&\\_t=8l2iJwnb9q7](https://www.tiktok.com/@clearlyclose/video/7182361296388754734?_r=1&_t=8l2iJwnb9q7).

After this inspiration came to me, I began my yearlong thesis process. This included a research-packed Short semester term in January of 2024. During the first week, I went to the Denver Art Museum for research and inspiration. There, I found Daisy Patton's work "Untitled (Family Portrait on the Rocks)" from 2019 that is a part of her *Forgetting is So Long* exhibit. This work consists of an old, abandoned family photograph, blown up in size and revived with nature-based designs. The artist says that she does these works because she believes that these photos hold a lot of value even though they have been abandoned or lost.<sup>3</sup> She grew up not knowing much about her father as he was absent, and her mother raised her. This is something that I can relate to as someone who does not know the identity of their biological grandfather. Another aspect that I found intriguing about this work is how the artist takes old pictures of families and gives them a new life. I can see a parallel to my work, but I acknowledge that our approach comes from different angles. I want to look at the past critically and curiously in my research. My main goal is not to make a piece that necessarily gives new life to past stories but to display my study of my family's history through a more critical lens. However, this painting does open up the possibility of including the concept of giving new life to past histories in my work. I also had the opportunity to see a 2013 piece by Marie Watt (Seneca and German-Scots), titled *Blanket Story, Confluence, Heirloom, and Tenth Mountain Division*. The piece consists of many different blankets donated by the surrounding Denver community, highly piled on each other. Watt's says that in her work, she notices the significance of blankets in many communities, especially

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<sup>3</sup> Patton, Daisy. 2019. "Forgetting Is so Long, 2019." Daisy Patton. Accessed February 15, 2024. <https://www.daisypatton.com/forgetting-is-so-long-2019>.

Indigenous communities.<sup>4</sup> Blankets are a household item that everyone has, regardless of socioeconomic background. They are comforting and can hold a lot of history. Actually, during the short term, my grandparents gave me a blanket. It is unique because it is a blanket from the store located in the Muscogee (Creek) capital. At first, this piece gave me the idea of possibly working with a blanket in my piece. I thought about how I would interact with it, like using it in my movements or obscuring my body from the audience. However, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that that idea most likely would not operate effectively with the message of my work, but it could be an idea used for the future.

Another activity that I did during the first week of the Short term was going to my home dance studio, Colorado Conservatory of Dance. I have been attending this studio for about six years and taking classes in the adult division for five years. Because of this, I am familiar with some of the people who take classes at this studio and with any teachers. During this visit, I realized the cultivated community I have been a part of and have just consciously realized. As the class was getting ready, a teacher noticed my hair through the doorway and stopped to greet me in the lobby. I also had classmates ask me how my university studying was going and how surprised I was by how fast time had flown since they remembered when I was just a first year going to university almost four years ago. This experience reminded me that, within the United States, there are communities that are not solely based on ethnicity or racial ties. There are cultures that are not solely based on race, and they have become an ethnicity because of a shared

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<sup>4</sup> Watt, Marie. "About Blanket Stories: Transportation Object, Generous Ones, Trek." Marie Watt Studio. <http://mariewattstudio.com/projects/transportation-object/about>

history and proximity. This idea of communities not connected by race or ethnicity can be seen as an example of practical solidarity between different people. My father, who did not know his biological father, found a lot of solace in people to whom he was not related. He was raised by his childhood best friend's family and had many people he was so close to that I and their kids practically grew up cousins. His mother was also adopted alongside her biological sister and her adoptive brother, who was of a different race than she was, which contributed to my father's view of what family can actually mean. This is important to me because it heavily influenced my definition of family and because this type of flexibility in the reconnection process of heritage studying is essential.



*Figure 4: Howton, Brooke "Uisce". Personal photo. One of the walls of my grandmother's house, 2024*

After the first week of the short term had ended, I made my way to Oklahoma, where my maternal grandmother and grandfather reside. They live in the state's Eastern half on the cusp of the Muscogee (Creek) and Cherokee reservations. Being able to stay with them for the majority of the term helped me in my research and my mental health. I had many conversations with them that gave me new insights. For example,

because it was pecan season during my stay, my grandmother recounted the time when she was a child and would go into people's yards (after asking permission) and pick pecans. She then would save some to eat for herself and her family or sell them to people to make a little money. Pecans are a fascinating plant. They are native to the American

South. They are also the state nut for Georgia,<sup>5</sup> which bridges the gap between my family's connection to that state and Oklahoma. I also had the fortune to talk with my grandfather about his family, which he rarely speaks up about. In one of our conversations, he told me about how one of his family members was a sharecropper. This was interesting, considering the history of sharecropping in the United States. It gave me a new perspective on his family, filling me with joy and sadness. I felt joy because I learned something new about my family, but I felt a little sad because of the story's details.

That continuation of learning about history relevant to my family was maintained during my visit to The Tulsa Historical Society Museum. This museum had a whole exhibit exclusively on the Tulsa Race massacre that happened in May of 1921.<sup>6</sup> It was a very detailed exhibit that showed a timeline of the Greenwood district, where the massacre happened. It went as far back as when the land was first occupied by the tribes removed from their ancestral homelands and sent to Indian territory (or what was to become Oklahoma). I bring this up because of an exercise that I decided to do where I thought of the dates when certain family members were born or when they died, coupled with their location, and compared it to what was happening during that time/ in that location. I did this mostly with my grandmother's father since it is the clearest family and the one I have worked with most, so I have memorized many dates and locations.

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<sup>5</sup> Poitevint, Bobby. 2021. "Georgia Reclaims Top US Pecan Producer; Kemp Declares Pecans Official State Nut." <https://www.walb.com>. April 11, 2021. <https://www.walb.com/2021/04/10/georgia-reclaims-top-us-pecan-producer-kemp-declares-pecans-official-state-nut/>.

<sup>6</sup> Tulsa Historical Society & Museum. "1921 Tulsa Race Massacre." Tulsa Historical Society & Museum. <https://www.tulsa-history.org/exhibit/1921-tulsa-race-massacre/>.

This exercise is essential to the decolonization process because it can show how connected people can be to terrible historical events and how these events are sometimes not as far as people might initially realize. For my family, they were living just south of Tulsa in 1921. My great-grandfather was only fourteen at the time. That is my great-grandfather, whom I could have potentially met if not for his untimely death in 1968. That is not a long time and not very far from where he lived. The exhibit does mention that some of the surrounding white communities contributed donations to help the residents of the Greenwood district. This fact makes me wonder what my great-great-grandfather thought about the incident. Did he read about it in the newspaper while drinking his morning coffee? Did the family hear about it on the radio that night as they relaxed? What did they say, if they said anything at all? Did they contribute to the fund to help the community? These are questions that I will never have answered, which is all right. However, it helps me to contextualize events in history properly to make the connections between my family and historical and sociological issues.

After visiting the Tulsa Historical Society Museum, I also visited the Creek National Council House in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. This building used to be the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's capital building until they built the new one a couple blocks away some decades ago. The council house now serves as the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's museum for Okmulgee guests to come visit and learn about the tribe's history. This was my second time going here, but sometimes they change some of the exhibits, and I am always bound to miss details the first time around. Here, I brushed up on the history of my family's tribe, and I had the chance to speak to one of the museum curators. He is a Muscogee (Creek) Nation citizen and worked as an anthropologist at the National



Museum for the American Indian in Washington D.C. before moving back to Oklahoma and working at the council house. We discussed many different topics, such as language revitalization, since we both had family members who did not pass down the Muscogee language. How language is intertwined with culture and the importance of connection in communities also came up. For Muscogee people (and many other Natives), it is not odd to be asked who your family is in relation to the person you are talking to because there is a likely chance that you are distantly related. My family is inexplicably linked to any other Muscogee person whose last name is Berryhill or who has had a Muscogee ancestor with the last name Berryhill. There are other names that we are also related to, but Berryhill seems to be the most commonly found one. It was also pleasant to talk to another person outside of my family, who was also Muscogee, about Stomp Dances. It has been a while since I have been able to attend one, and I only know what happens at my family's dances, so hearing the experience from someone else who hails from the same tribe was an excellent experience.



*Figure 5: Howton, Brooke "Uisce". Personal photo. Entrance to the Creek Nation Council House, 2024*

While in Oklahoma, I took dance classes to keep up my physique and stamina. But what was extra special about the dance classes I took during this month were the Irish and Scottish Highland dance classes I attended. I have never taken a dance class for these dance styles before besides the YouTube videos I learned from when I was a kid, convinced that I would get into the dance someday. This experience was a dream come true as someone who is an admirer of these dance styles and for the child in me who has always wanted to try the dances one day. The teacher I took classes from was KT Goode, who has been dancing since she was six years old and began Irish dance at sixteen. She teaches adult classes that are filled with people with varying expertise. Some adults were beginners like me; some used to dance as children and were coming back, and some had been dancing non-stop for decades. Even though Irish dance is different from ballet, I found a lot of similarities to how the adult classes operated compared to the adult ballet classes that I usually take at the Colorado Conservatory of Dance. I also used a lot of my ballet experience to do some of the movements in the Irish class, though I had to be extra diligent to do them properly for the technique. These classes brought me immense joy even though I was not picking up the movements as quickly as one would expect a dance major or an adult to. However, the classes gave me a challenge that reminded me why I loved dance.

Another thing that we did in class that I found interesting was one of the beginning jigs that I was taught once I had a decent grasp of the basics. Mrs. Goode told me that this jig is one that pretty much every Irish dancer learns first but is one of the jigs you will almost never see at performances. Dancers learn it partly for technique's sake but also because of tradition. It is an old dance, so its movements are quite a

bit simpler than newer jigs. I found this fascinating as it is a clear example of living dance history and a display of how many different types of dances evolve, even when we, as the public, are almost unaware. It reminds me that change and evolution are constantly happening, which is both exciting and scary.

Once I came back to Hollins to begin my second semester of my senior year, I started to look into what *exactly* is White supremacy and look at how race has operated in the United States throughout history. This research would come to solidify my thesis topic and help me with my approach to choreograph the concept. I made it my goal to learn how to decolonize my mind and actions in order to dismantle White supremacy through looking into my family's history and reconnecting with my heritage. This begins with understanding what exactly is White supremacy. According to author, Tema Okun, White supremacy is, "...the ways in which the ruling class elite or the power elite in the colonies of what was to become the United States used the pseudo-scientific concept of race to create whiteness and a hierarchy of racialized people in order to disconnect..."<sup>7</sup> White supremacy does this by pressuring communities to conform to a standard and not see peoples' differences when they need to be acknowledged. One example of this is when a person Googles something like "ponytails" and the majority of the results are of White women with pin-straight hair. The algorithm considers those results as the default and if that person wants to find results that include women of color or women with textured hair, they have to add extra information into the search bar. The "standard" is White women with straight hair and anything different is the "other" that you have to put

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<sup>7</sup> Okun, Tema *White Supremacy Culture - Still Here - Drworksbook*, [www.dismantlingracism.org/uploads/4/3/5/7/43579015/white\\_supremacy\\_culture\\_-\\_still\\_here.pdf](http://www.dismantlingracism.org/uploads/4/3/5/7/43579015/white_supremacy_culture_-_still_here.pdf). Accessed 9 Oct. 2023.

extra work in to find. Differences between racial groups need to be recognized, not to separate people or to treat them differently in a negative way, but to become more aware of cultures unlike our own and to give space for them to exist in this world. When White Americans uphold a “colorblindness” philosophy, Whiteness is not examined more thoroughly to search for its intertwined supremacist ideals.<sup>8</sup>

At the start of my first semester of my senior year at Hollins, I began reading *Black Looks: Race and Representation* by bell hooks. Overall, the book helped me think more about the intricacies of my topic. bell hooks especially focuses on the ways that subjects such as Blackness and Whiteness in media should be viewed and examined. This is important because even though I am a person who is only of White and Native descent, my family’s history and how I operate in society is directly intertwined with Black history and how African Americans experience life in this country. This book also made sure that I was constantly questioning the systems that I interact with on a daily basis, of what their history is and how they potentially could affect certain communities.

I also read *Beyond White Ethnicity: Developing a Sociological Understanding of Native American Identity Reclamation* by Kathleen J. Fitzgerald. This book happened to reference bell hooks’s *Black Looks* in a section about race politics in the United States. Both Fitzgerald’s and hooks’s writings on the topic made me more aware of how

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<sup>8</sup> Hitchcock, Jeff. “Let’s Recognize White American Culture.” *Center for the Study of White American Culture*, 30 Sept. 2020, [cswac.org/lets-recognize-white-american-culture/](http://cswac.org/lets-recognize-white-american-culture/).

Whiteness in my family operates within White supremacy. This book in particular follows a couple of people with various experiences of how they grew up being mixed Natives. Fitzgerald attempts to show the effects that assimilation has had on specific mixed Native families and how some of them are taking the time and effort to dismantle that assimilation. Much of this book relates to my own family since I come from a Muscogee lineage. In my experience, that aspect of my family was never hidden, a privilege granted to me because of the lessening of stigma. However, much of the language and certain aspects of the culture have not been passed down. Most of this was because of said stigma coupled with the sudden passing of my great grandfather when my grandmother was only fifteen. My family still has our connections and small wisps of the culture still remain, but it has been a process to get back what was once lost. We have the privilege of having family members who are taking the time to teach us skills and traditions, as well as our tribe's various outreach and at-large programs that keep us in the loop. Fitzgerald's writing also showed me that Native identity is very complex because of its history—government assimilation, attempted acts of genocide, and racist legislation all affect a Native person's identity one way or another. This book gave me a broader knowledge of how different Natives see identity politics and encouraged me to look at my family's thoughts as well as my own.

While reading the previously mentioned books, I felt encouraged to begin asking more questions such as, “how do I find out more about the benefits of reconnecting to one's heritage when trying to dismantle White supremacy?” and “how do I find clear and specific resources about the history of White supremacy in the U.S.?” After many trips to the library and online search hunts, I was finally about to find some answers. For

instance, I came across a book titled *The History of White People* by Nell Irvin Painter. As the title suggests, it is indeed the history of White people as we know them in the U.S., but she also goes as far back as ancient Greece in its exploration of how terms such as “White” and “Caucasian” came to be used in this contemporary moment. It also follows the development of White supremacy as it began as a way for Europeans to separate themselves from the Africans that they stole for the slave trade and eventually the Native peoples in the Americas. Painter goes on to discuss exactly *why* there should be no pride taken in using White as a descriptor for a group of people nor why it should be used as a unifying aspect for certain communities. In the chapter, “Early American White People Observed”, she says, “Murder remains the central figure of whiteness, though a sliver of hope for their future might reside in the American heritage of freedom...”<sup>9</sup> At its core, Whiteness is intertwined with violence and thus should be thoroughly examined and reimagined in order to benefit many different communities. This is exactly why solidarity with minority communities is also very important. Crossing the sociological and political boundaries is an absolute must in this work. This can be done by taking the time to learn about different groups and histories, as well as, by keeping an open mind when faced with criticism by people affected by White supremacy. Another strategy that Painter gives is by being aware that, “...real American identity [is] coded according to race, being a real American often meant joining antilock racism and seeing oneself against blacks.”<sup>10</sup> Understanding the history of what White supremacy meant to the people who were our ancestors is vital in making change in this

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<sup>9</sup> Painter, Nell Irvin. 2010. *The History of White People*. 1st ed. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

<sup>10</sup> Painter, Nell Irvin. 2010.

contemporary moment. It does very little to give the “benefit of the doubt” to the ancestors we connect with.



Figure 6: Howton, Brooke “Uisce”.  
Personal photo. Vest Embroidery

From the start, I knew that I wanted to include regalia into my thesis performance. Though ethnicity is not *just* about clothing, the use of traditional and folk clothing is important, and I believed that it would operate well in my work. My regalia is an amalgamation of the cultural clothing that my family hails from. The shirt, vest, and brooch (called a *sølje*) are based on Norwegian bunad and festdrakt. I chose to specifically make a festdrakt rather than a bunad because bunad are required to be made out of specific materials and include specific designs set for each region of Norway.<sup>11</sup> However, festdrakt can be made and designed however the maker wishes while still looking distinctly bunad like. The vest of the festdrakt is also embroidered with a design that was inspired by the ones that I have seen on bunad, but I made it using plants that are relevant to my background. It includes thistle, the national flower of Scotland, clovers and flax, the national plants of Ireland, and tulips, the national flower of the Netherlands. It also features saxifrage cotyledon, the national flower of



Figure 7: Howton, Brooke “Uisce”.  
Personal photo. My Sølje

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<sup>11</sup> K, Roman. 2016. “Folk Costume & Embroidery: Overview of Norwegian Costumes. Part 1, the Southeast.”FolkCostume&Embroidery. February 7, 2016.  
<http://folkcostume.blogspot.com/2016/02/overview-of-costumes-of-norway-part-one.html>.

Norway, an azalea, the state wildflower for Georgia (where my Muscogee ancestors are from), and pecans, which my family has significant history with as they are found in both Georgia and Oklahoma. The *sølje* is a brooch whose name means “sunny”.<sup>12</sup> It has little, circular adornments that make the brooch jingle when you move. The piece of jewelry is given to babies and brides as a way to ward off evil spirits. I included these aspects into my regalia for my performance because of the fact that I never received a *sølje* as a child since my paternal grandmother was adopted. To me, it felt important to include the ancestors that I never knew about until recently so that I can make up for the time that they were unknown.



*Figure 8:Howton, Brooke “Uisce”. Personal photo. My Irish Crios Belt*

The belt that I made for the piece is an Irish críos belt. These were belts worn by fishermen in the Aran Islands. The women in their lives would weave the belts in a specific color combination and pattern, so that if a man were to fall off of a ship, his washed-up body could be identified.<sup>13</sup> In more modern times, the críos belt is what little folk clothing Ireland has left since the suppression of Irish culture by the English from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>14</sup> and is worn by anyone. I took the 2024 short term semester to

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<sup>12</sup> Bucheit, Liz. 2021. “Worn Within: How Did *Sølje* Become Norwegian Heirlooms? | TPT Originals.” TPT Originals. TPT Originals. June 1, 2021. <https://www.tptoriginals.org/worn-within-how-did-solje-become-norwegian-heirlooms/>.

<sup>13</sup> Mac Gowan, Alva. 2014. “Crios Cords: Traditional Irish Woven Belts” *Irisharchaeology.ie*. September 11, 2014. <http://irisharchaeology.ie/2014/09/crios-cords-traditional-irish-woven-belts/>.

<sup>14</sup> Mac Gowan, “Crios Cords: Traditional Irish Woven Belts”



use the traditional hand-foot weaving method to make my belt. The process is not as complicated as it seems and is very methodical in practice. In the summer of 2023, I wove my first crios belt, so I had a better idea of what I was doing this time around.

Instead of a traditional festdrakt skirt, I replaced it with a ribbon skirt done in a style that is more commonly seen in Southeastern Native tribes. These skirts are a facet among many tribes, so I wanted to represent that part of my heritage with it. For Southeastern tribes such as the Muscogee, the skirts tend to have a single ruffled tier at the bottom. This is partly a stylistic choice and a practical choice. The single tier allows space for the tin can/ turtle shell shakers that Muscogee women attach to the bottom half of their legs during stomp dance ceremonies. Over the summer of 2023, I had the privilege of learning how to make one from my great aunt who is a traditionalist in her tribe, the Shawnee. It was with this knowledge and with the help of my grandmother that I was able to take the 2024 short term semester to make the skirt for



Figure 9: Howton, Brooke "Uisce".  
Personal photo. My Ribbon Skirt



Figure 10: James, Florence. Personal photo. Me and my Great Aunt,  
2023

the performance.

After combining all of these different clothing pieces, I believe that I now properly display that I am not just one portion of my heritage. I am a

culmination of many different backgrounds and ancestors who have all come together to make *me*.

Yet, I do not begin my performance in this regalia. Instead, I start off in a white t-shirt, white pants, and white socks to show the blankness that White supremacy pushes towards people. It is once I begin to “tumble” into my family’s history and background more that I remove the white clothing and slowly gather each piece of my regalia. Underneath the white clothing is an olive green unitard. I chose that clothing and color because I did not want to have any nudity even hinted at, because that could greatly change the interpretation of my piece. The unitard doesn’t get in the way of any of my clothes and doesn’t stand out too much, but it also is not a skin tone type of color that could be interpreted as me being naked.

My working title did not morph very much through the process. That is, until I started thinking more about what I wanted to imply and what I didn’t want to imply. Originally, I chose a title that featured different languages for the word “heritage”. I specifically used Mvskoke (Muscogee), Gàidhlig (Scottish Gaelic), Norsk (Norwegian) all next to English. At first it looked something like this...

Dualchas/ Vculvke Tatē/ Arv/ Heritage

Though, as my research continued, I decided that a new title was necessary. Initially, I began to look at different words that had complex meanings, hoping to find one that would hopefully pertain to my work. That idea turned into looking at “untranslatable” words in one of my ancestral languages to keep with the intention to use

them instead of English. However, that did not result in anything since many of the words that I was finding did not go with any of my themes. I then thought about using the element of flower language into my title. I have always been enamored by plant symbolism because it is fascinating to think about the meanings that humans have developed for different plants. I scoured sources and lists for a specific type of plant that would be able to encompass my heritage in some way and mean something that went with my thesis topic. At first, I almost considered the plant, coltsfoot since means “justice shall be done”. This statement felt *very* impactful and somewhat on track of what my intentions in my work were. Despite the meaning, the plant is not native to the Americas and is actually *quite* invasive. This revelation made me hesitant to use it. The plant name was also difficult to find in the ancestral languages.

After some consultation with friends and family, I finally decided to use the dandelion for my title. Ironically enough, the dandelion is a close cousin to coltsfoot, and they look *very* similar, but their symbolism is incredibly different. Dandelions are chockfull of different meanings across many different cultures. They mean resiliency, since they are able to adapt to different environments, they can mean community since they grow in clusters, and they can represent celestial bodies through their life cycle.<sup>15</sup> The roots of a dandelion grow quite deep, which is a striking symbol in and of itself. The common dandelion is indigenous to the Eurasian continent, but were brought to the Americas via the English in the seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> Unlike coltsfoot, the plant is much

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<sup>15</sup>Grant, Jennifer. 2023. “Dandelions.” Gather Magazine. June 20, 2023.  
<https://www.gathermagazine.org/dandelions/>.

<sup>16</sup>Grant, Jennifer. “Dandelions”.

more positive in its contributions to the American environment and ecosystem by being a good source of food for different pollinators and birds.<sup>17</sup> I believe that the dandelion is a good representation of what a non-Indigenous person/ settler can be when they occupy a land that they do not come from. Dandelions are an example that settlers can still be on the land that has been stolen from its original keepers, but in a beneficial way, rather than in an invasive way.

While in the decolonization process, I am of the belief that a person should expose themselves to Indigenous and minority languages (in the case of this title Muscogee and Scottish Gaelic). I chose to keep the use of ancestral languages in my title for that reason. It is also important to remind people that these languages are still living and ever evolving which I tried to showcase by putting them side by side with more commonly spoken languages (Norwegian and Dutch). However, I came across one big issue: the Muscogee language does not have a word for “dandelion”. I had to come up with a solution. Either I transliterate the word using the Muscogee alphabet or use the Muscogee word for “a weed” which is sometimes used to talk about the dandelion but is *incredibly* generalized. I decided to take the more specific route, so I attempted to transliterate the word into Muscogee using my knowledge of the language. This resulted in me writing dandelion as “tvntēli’on” (pronounced dun-dee-lay-on) to use for the title of my piece.

I began with choreographing to a song titled, “Blightskin” by THRONE, which is about having a more complex identity beyond physical appearances. The song was written by a rap duo, one of who is Muscogee (Creek), which made it relatable to me and

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<sup>17</sup> Grant, Jennifer. “Dandelions”.

my family history. Though, as time went on, the song no longer fit what my research was about, despite its relatable message. Another potential song was “Kulning” song by No Tongues feat. Isabel Sörling, which is a contemporary take on Scandinavian herd call singing. It was chaotic, which set the tone. I desired to convey the idea that reconnecting and decolonizing are messy and overwhelming at times. Again, as my research expanded, I felt that this song did not fit my intended message. During the month long short-term semester in January, a month-long semester engulfed with my senior thesis project, I endured much turmoil trying to find, or even think of, what I wanted for my sound score. I struggled with finding a song that went with the energy and message I had imagined for my performance.

Eventually, I focused in on what White supremacy does to cultural communities. It strips them of their differences to make a “blank” slate so that injustice against other communities is not called out because of the disconnect.<sup>18</sup> In response to this shift, I began making a sound score consisting of the sound of powerlines droning. I chose this noise specifically because it is constantly “moving,” but it also feels stagnant. This reminded me of how White supremacy is constantly working in everything that we do, whether we realize it or not, as well as the conformity that it pushes for. Eventually, an experimental jazz song slowly starts to interject the droning powerline noise. The piece is by the Tom Prehn Quartet and is titled “F. Eks”. It is very abstract and has a slow build. My goal with this song was to have it represent the process of studying and looking into one’s family history. It can be a messy ordeal and also confusing, so the abstractness of the piece really fits. That song then transitions into another jazz song, “Lineage” by Mali

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<sup>18</sup> Okun, Tema *White Supremacy Culture*

Obomsawin (Abenaki). The song represents “the timeless story of the Abenaki”<sup>19</sup> where their existence has been never ending, including times of peace and times of turmoil. I chose it because of its ability to convey chaos that all comes together in the end. Transposed over “Lineage” is snippets of different languages being spoken. The languages included are Muscogee, Norwegian, Scottish Gaelic, Dutch, and Gaelge (Irish). There are also transposed sounds of some recordings of my own parents speaking excerpts from ancestral documents, old cultural books, and poems. The different voices and languages are almost as if each one of my ancestors is saying something—I just need to try and listen.

I have constantly tried to think of how to make this piece operate in a way that the audience knows that they should get involved, but not in a “call out” kind of way. In my understanding of sociological works, having the audience shut down means that they most likely will not get the message at all. In my dance history class, we looked at the Bill T. Jones/ Arnie Zane Dance Company and discussed their contributions to the dance world and what made them so unique. After that class, I chatted with a classmate about a performance from the company that I have seen called *What Problem?* This work was made to call out people, but I believe it was done in a way that helped to engage the audience. I analyzed *What Problem?* as well as *Still / Here* to take note of how the artist uses spoken word in a creative, yet informative way. In the past, when I have included spoken word in my works, I always feared that it is said too quickly for audience

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<sup>19</sup> Crane, Josh. 2022. “Odanak First Nation’s Mali Obomsawin Tells Indigenous Stories through Music.” Npr.Org, National Public Radio . November 5, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/11/05/1134294116/odanak-first-nations-mali-obomsawin-tells-indigenous-stories-through-music>.

members to fully process and understand while attempting to observe the dancer presented. However, the Bill T. Jones/ Arnie Zane Dance Company has formulated a way to meld spoken word and movement together that operates effectively.

This idea of making sociological works effective in their messaging is discussed in the book *Privileged Spectatorship: Theatrical Interventions in White Supremacy*. Specifically, how privilege affects interpretations of sociological art works. In the chapter, “Maintain White Racial Comfort”, the author recounts a time that they went to see the play, *Broken Fences* by Ann Filmer and Ilesa Duncan which touches on the subject of gentrification. After the showing, there was an artist talkback and during it, a “middle-class-looking white audience member” talks about how rent in a certain part of Chicago used to be cheaper when it was “more dangerous”.<sup>20</sup> The author sits there and is flabbergasted as the apparent disconnect is plain to see to them. This section of the book impacted how I thought of how I wanted my work to operate in regard to my audience. It gave me the awareness that no matter how hard I try, there is bound to be people who simply don’t get it. How I approach this issue is by making sure that I am constantly getting feedback from many different kinds of people. Non-dancers, other artists, people with different backgrounds and experiences all can give me the insight of what is and is not working within my works. I also learned that it is important to know who your audience is going to be in a performance. Keeping the dance flexible with prompt-based improvisation allows room for me to make changes depending on what I think will resonate with the audience the most.

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<sup>20</sup> Snyder-Young, Dani. 2020. *Privileged Spectatorship*. Chicago: Northwestern University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv15vwkdw>.

From the beginning, I wanted to look more into contemporary dance by Indigenous choreographers. Sadly, I was not familiar with many Indigenous choreographers because they are not taught about often. When I thought of Indigenous dance, I thought of Stomp Dances, Pow Wows, and the Five Moons. For context, Stomp Dances are dance ceremonies done by many different tribes, including my family's tribe, the Muscogee. They consist of dancers wearing turtle shell shin pads (or, more modernly, tin can shin pads) called shell shakers as they walk to people singing. Pow Wows are an event commonly put on by Plains tribes, though you can find them happening everywhere in the United States these days. Many types of Indigenous dances are showcased at these events, such as Jingle dress, Grass dance, and Southern Cloth dance. The Five Moons consisted of dancers Maria Tallchief (Osage), her sister, Marjorie Tallchief (Osage), Yvonne Chouteau (Shawnee), Rosella Hightower (Choctaw), and Moscelyne Larkin (Peoria/ Eastern Shawnee) who all had prolific careers in the ballet world. These are all really important aspects of the Indigenous dance world, but there are certainly more stories missing. I found Olivia Camfield (Muscogee) through the Native Arts & Culture Foundation, where they made a work in 2018. The performance, *Which Way is Up I've Never Been Here Before*, premiered at Performance Works NW as a part of their Alembic Artist in Residence program. The almost seventeen-minute dance consists of four dancers, Indigenous language and music sounds, and lots of floor work. Camfield describes the piece as an example of Queer Indigenous Futurism with its inclusion of Indigenous culture, but in a contemporary or even futuristic way, and the use of non-conventional imagery, such as the costumes the dancers wore, which have reflective



strips applied on them.<sup>21</sup> This work was significant to my thesis' choreographic process because it was one of the few examples of taking aspects of Indigenous culture and implementing them in a contemporary way. Also, the choreographer was from the same tribe as me, which made it even more relatable.

During my choreographic process, I tried improvising movement with only two prompts in my head: the words “grotesque” and “tired”. My goal was to show how the process of decolonizing one’s mindset and looking into their family’s history can be a messy ordeal that feels disgusting at times, especially for European-Americans. To look back at a family tree and see people who more than likely committed atrocities, can be difficult to work through and make a person feel like a disgusting tumor grows within them. Something that they did not ask for, but don’t know how to get rid of. The word “tired” came up because the work to reconnect with one’s heritage, after your family has been assimilated for so long, is difficult and overwhelming or even frustrating at times. I took this physical feedback from the improvisation session and began to choreograph a flow to it. At times, I wanted to throw everything away and ignore the past, but even when I take breaks, I still find myself going back for more. This rigid movement turns more chaotic and frantic as the abstract sound score begins, until it finally transitions into Mali Obomsawin’s “Lineage” which is the catalyst for my next movements.

One prominent choreographer who influenced my movement style in the second section of the piece is Pina Bausch. I learned of her in my first year at Hollins and have

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<sup>21</sup> Camfield, Olivia. *Which Way Is Up I've Never Been Here Before: Performance*. 2019.  
<https://www.oliviacamfield.com/whichwayisupiveneverbeenherebefore>

been enamored with her work since. More specifically, I have taken much interest in her works *Café Müller* and *The Rite of Spring*. In both dances, she utilizes breath within the choreography, adding a human quality to the pieces. In many concert dances, dancers can be seen as otherworldly beings because of all of the fantastic things they can do. I believe that Bausch retains this spectacularism but also includes intense emotion and the sounds of breathing to show labor and humanity within the dancers. To show the stark contrast between the first section of my choreography and the second section, I begin very rigidly, as mentioned before, with no specific attention to the sound of my breath. Then, once I put on the regalia, I move with fluid quality, with the sound of my breath once in a while, all reminiscent of Bausch's style of choreography.

While making the choreography for the second section of my thesis performance, I also had the urge to include movements and ideas that I learned from Irish dance, Scottish Highland dancing, and Stomp dances. Yet, I did not want to simply put these dances into my work as they are because they are highly stylized. Instead, I approached them with a more abstract intention. For example, I walk and dance in a counterclockwise circle in the second section. This is heavily inspired by the direction Stomp dances take, but it also displays how cyclical life is. On the first lap, I gently put the clothes down with care. On the next lap, I frantically take the white clothes off because I finally know how much harm they are doing to me. Once those clothes are off, I put each part of my regalia on individually. Each lap of the circle differs in movement, with some laps being filled with dance sequences, some being solely pedestrian, and some that include falling and fumbling. Near the end, once all the regalia is on, I show varying degrees of the abstracted Irish and Scottish Highland dance. I do a turn with my leg in front touching the

ground, turning inwards, inspired by the turns found in Irish soft shoe jigs. In a couple of laps, I do a movement where one leg jumps out to the side, the other lands in the middle of my foot, and I lightly step on it before that foot kicks out to jump. This jump is similar to the jumps found at the beginning of Scottish Highland Sword dances, though I do not hold my arms on my hips as those dancers do, nor do I move with as much precision either.

As I get close to the end, my laps vary in their content. Sometimes, I do full-on dance movements within them, and other times, I fumble around. The intention behind this was to signify how messy the process of decolonization can be. Much of the work that I have done and will continue to do will bring some aspect of peace to my soul, but most of the time, it brings me turmoil. This is to be expected, however, as the knowledge of oppressive systems, yet not being able to change them by yourself, is challenging to deal with. Also, hearing about the atrocities committed against some of my ancestors and of the atrocities that were committed by some of my other ancestors can be difficult to stomach. By choreographing this idea with laps that consist of the dancer tripping and falling over themselves, I show the reality of this process. Ultimately, it is all worth it, but that does not mean it was not difficult. How a piece ends is crucial to ensuring the audience leaves with something from the work. At least, this is what I thought about while making the piece. As mentioned before, I wanted my thesis performance to be informative, but I understood that giving too much information in such a small amount of time can cause the audience to be overwhelmed and ultimately take away nothing from the work. This is why I end the piece with two laps of repetitive movement, to show that the process is constantly moving, followed by a slow walk up towards the audience,

where I stand and look around at them intently. This gives the audience time to digest what they have just seen. I also briefly had the house lights come up as I scanned the audience. This is meant to convey that I am, in fact, looking at them before I offer my right hand out, the house lights dimming as a spotlight focuses solely on me, as an invitation to begin their decolonization process. The ending goes quite slowly so that the image of me holding my hand while the audio of my mother saying a quote from Julian Talamantez Brolaski's book *Of Mongrelitude*, "to have not forgone one's ancestors," is heard and remembered.

On May 3rd, 2024, I had the opportunity to premiere my thesis performance in the Hollins theater at the Spring Dance Concert. The turnout that night (and the subsequent night of May 4th) was pleasant, which made me even more excited to show my new work. In preparation for the performance, I did things that kept me calm throughout the evening, especially as we got closer to the performance. I listened to music with bright energy, stretched my body out as I found that helps my mind relax, and made sure to eat a good meal before our call time. One of the regrets that I realized during my artist talk presentation that had happened earlier in the day on May 3rd is the fact that I did not take care of my mental health as much as I should have. This was one of the questions I got during that presentation, and while I cannot change the past, I can set myself up for success in the future. Thus, I focused on my mental health for this performance.

Something else that I decided to prepare was my regalia. In one of the rehearsals, I had earlier in performance week, I attempted to put on my vest but found it oddly tight. When I took it off to check what had changed, I realized I had left the clasp on the front

of the vest closed when I had last folded it. This made me extra diligent in ensuring this would not be an issue during the actual performances. Other details regarding the preparation of the regalia also included making sure my skirt was folded in a way that was not too tight since I wanted it to fall out of its folded position more easily. I would also double-check that I actually picked my shirt up from the pile of folded clothes since it was on the bottom of the pile. Since, in the sequence of my dancing, I required that the shirt be the last piece of clothing to be unfolded from the pile and placed down. However, that meant that the shirt would be under my skirt, which is quite large. I forgot the shirt several times in past rehearsals before finally realizing I needed to check that it had made it under the pile. Once these were all properly arranged, I was finally ready for the performance.

As mentioned before, the choreography included at the beginning of the piece is rigid in quality. This included my fingers and wrists moving in extreme ways that they were not used to. Because of this, I intentionally warmed up my wrists and fingers to prevent any injury. This comprised wrist stretches, finger stretches, and flexion of the



*Figure 11: Currin, Audrey "AJ". Personal photo. Section one on first performance night*

joints to warm them up. I also had jumps within the second section of my dance, so some shin splint exercises and foot warmups were in order. This ensured I could come out of this dance without injuries or significant pains.



*Figure 12: Currin, Audrey "AJ". Personal photo. Second section on first performance night*

The outcome of my first performance was excellent. However, one minor incident just as we had finished our warmups was when I found out that I was missing one of the white socks I wore at the beginning of the piece. This made me quite nervous. However, I am fortunate that my dormitory is quite close to the theater. I was not the first act on the show, and the socks that I used for the piece came in a three-pack. So, I ran to my dormitory to grab an extra white sock, cut a tiny hole in the bottom for better traction, and returned to the theater. After that, my costume was finally properly prepared, with my shirt tucked into my pants, my regalia in place, and my body warmed up. The first section of the performance went very smoothly, with each lighting cue coming right on time. I also felt satisfied with my movement quality in the first section, on top of the timing, which went as planned. The second section of the work also went without a hitch. Through my rehearsals, I learned I needed to remind myself to take my time and breathe through the performance. Otherwise, I risked rushing and/ or fumbling movements or clothing. This was something that I made sure to do during the performance, which not only helped the production go very smoothly but

also helped me keep a level head throughout the work. In this premiere show, I had two minor issues, including being a little late in getting to the ground to transition between my first and second sections, and I missed a turn that was supposed to happen in the middle of the second section. However, these were, luckily, very minor details that I believe did not inhibit the piece's message from getting to the audience properly.

On May 4th, I performed my second showing of my thesis performance. This was an interesting time period in my thesis process. I was officially halfway through the performance portion of my thesis, which meant I had a lot of insight into how the performance of the piece felt. After the performance from the previous night, I went home and made sure to appropriately take care of my body by foam rolling it and doing physical therapy exercises. This left me feeling better and more primed to dance than before the previous night's performance.

Nonetheless, I still did the exercises for my hands and feet that I had done the evening before, listened to music with bright energy, and ate a proper meal before our call time. I meticulously folded my regalia and checked my white costume before I finally went up to the stage to get ready to perform once again. It was backstage, however, where I realized that my *sølje* had partially fallen apart. The part of the brooch that pins the piece of jewelry to clothing fell off, though it was not broken. Despite that, the *sølje* would not have been fixable in the short time I had while waiting backstage. I attempted to fix it several times before ultimately deciding to put it back in its box and proceed without it. As someone who does not like to give up easily, I found it challenging to slow the situation down and continue, but the work performed

before my piece had just finished, and the lights were going out. I told myself that the “show must go on” and reassured myself everything would be all right.

After putting the brooch down, I got myself ready to go on. This performance (despite the missing piece) also went very smoothly. I felt the beginning section in a way that I had not before, as I simply felt the emotion of the piece bubble up in my chest. Though this was a lot of emotion, my mind still felt clearer than ever, which somewhat surprised me. Because of this, I could focus on every detail of the work I wanted. One similarity that this performance had with the previous one was that I was still late in my transition between sections one and two, but again, this was relatively minor in its effect on the message of the overall work, and I could make it work. In the second section, I felt very aware of my movements and confident in knowing what to do next. I still performed as if I had the brooch on the stage, but I took the time to adjust my shirt and vest instead. Unlike the first performance, I remembered the turn I had forgotten the night before. It was nice to have been able to do it at least once on the stage in the main performance since it is one of my favorite turns to do, and it helped me keep on track with my choreography. Although, I rushed the second section more this night than the previous evening since I had to do an extra lap before the end. Again, this was a minor issue that I believe did not affect the piece's overall message, so I improvised pedestrian movement to cover up the extra lap.

The performances, as a whole, went very well and were experiences that I could not have asked to have gone any better than they had. I am not too torn up about the small instances where things did not go “perfectly” because I know that the work operated how



it needed to with them. What is most important to me is that I felt prepared in my body to perform this piece and that my mind felt clear and at peace during the performance process. After the show, I talked to my friends about how the concert went and received great feedback. Many acquaintances thought the piece went smoothly and were proud of my work. Others also confronted me about my work, which brought me so much joy since I consider their feedback very important in my process. Many people said that they found the piece to be powerful and could tell that there was a story of some sort pushing it forward. This made me feel accomplished because people who did not know how the process went nor what exactly the work was explicitly about could pick up on important details. This also made me think of the changes I would make for this work to be even more effective.

If I were to revisit this work in the future, I would do a couple of things differently. I would begin by making a different shirt as the one that I originally made for this work was slightly ill-fitting, which made it difficult for me to efficiently button it up in the performance; it made it difficult for the shirt to stay buttoned up at times, and because it looked odd at times when I put it on. I think fixing this aspect of the piece would streamline the performance more. Another detail that I considered adding in originally but eventually refrained from was using projections. In the middle of my senior year at Hollins, I thought of possibly using a projector to display some of the historical documents and family pictures I had found during my genealogical studies. However, I did not do this because I was unsure how it would operate and how to show this during the Dance Department's Workshop Showing process. The projection

could have potentially added more context to the piece and made the idea operate in a way that made it easier or faster for the audience to get.

On the other hand, it could have been potentially overwhelming to have a project, chaotic audio, and dancing all at once. If I did add projection into the work, I think I would need more still moments in my piece to allow the audience time to digest what they saw. There is also the potential to not use projection at all since I had the goal to make a dance and not a presentation, though that might not exactly be what it would be like.

Reflecting on this yearlong thesis process, I felt I could take much away and into the next chapter in my life. This research has constantly reminded me to question the systems around me. It reminds me of why I began this work in the first place: to improve the world, starting with myself, one person at a time. I learned about how White supremacy pushes for conformity within White communities in order to disregard and harm communities of color. It teaches people to be ignorant of the greater systems that surround everyone in the United States that bring even more harm. Through this year, I learned more about my family than I have ever had the chance to before. For example, at the beginning of my senior year at Hollins University, I did not know that my great-grandfather spoke some of the Muscogee language yet passed none of it down to my grandmother. This is a fact that I would've potentially never learned about if it were not for the research done in this thesis. My new goal with this work is to continue decolonizing my mind, actions, and surroundings by analyzing my family's history. It

includes taking those analyses and applying them to my life as history surrounds me.

Time doesn't stop, and history is always in the making.

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