

Black American Tree Project



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Who are we?



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Background



- ❧ The **Black American Tree Project** is a collaborative **participatory history lesson/immersive performance** experience. It is developed in collaboration with Pan-African educators, artists, writers, and non-profit professionals. The project was created in response to the **Kairos Blanket Exercise** by indigenous Canadian leaders, the **Starfire String Exercise** by dis/ability experts, and the **New York Times 1619 project**. The project is a **90-minute interactive workshop that educates audiences about the legacies of slavery in modern American society--especially in the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky area--and its after-effects in housing, the medical establishment, prison system, schooling, and other areas in which Black Americans are affected.** This experience is designed to evoke a sense of reckoning during this **401th anniversary since black Africans were brought to America.**

Intentions



- ❧ We want the participants to comprehend and feel, based on factual evidence, the atrocities of key societal forces, both past and present, and the role authority, family, and community, play in conjunction with these forces.
- ❧ We have intentionally avoided any theatrical elements the use of a script might include.
- ❧ We agree that multiple forces can operate simultaneously. However, our hope in naming them separately is to make them visible, instead of allowing them to remain disconnected and invisible which creates the environment for the forces to be largely unchallenged.
- ❧ This immersive project seeks to focus on the crushing impact the institution of systemic racism has had on the Black American, we intentionally did not include events, within the scripts, that were celebratory.

Exercise Components



- ❧ Scripted dialogue and narration
- ❧ A tree to act as a simple configuration to act as the “stage” for the participants
- ❧ Roles for institutions that have led to the devaluation of Black Americans throughout society
- ❧ Roles for those affected by these structural forces
- ❧ Roles for family members of those affected by institutional forces
- ❧ The severing of families through the cutting of the string
Debriefing and reflection

The Tree



❧ The **tree** is central to this exercise because it represents a place of wholeness, naturalness, and where families thrive in a lush, collective environment. In the first visual of the tree, the families start off as intact entities while the forces loom and encroach upon the focus Black American. The image of the tree will be brought up at key moments in the project so you can get a feel as to how the structural institutional forces have negatively impacted and broken up the solid family. By the time we move through the entire project, you will notice that the tree has been stripped of the Black American who now makes up a growing under caste (as Michelle Alexander puts it in her book, *The New Jim Crow*.) So, in addition to the tree, we use a virtual space at the base of the tree marked as the **edge of society** representing how the institutional experiences create a segregated group, an “us” vs. “them.”

Roles: Institutional Forces

❧ Slave Trading: **Slave Trader**

❧ Slavery/Capitalism: **Slave Master**

❧ Medical Industrial Complex: **Doctor**

❧ Law Enforcement/Prison Industrial Complex
Government: **Police Officer**

❧ Housing Crisis: **Real Estate Agent**

❧ Entertainment Industry: **Minstrel Club Owner**

❧ Educational: **Teacher**

❧ Non-Profit Organizations: **Nonprofit Employer**

❧ Military Industrial Complex: **Military**

Roles: Black Americans



- ❧ Villager
- ❧ Slave
- ❧ Patient/Medical Subject
- ❧ Police Brutality Victim
- ❧ Home Owner
- ❧ Black Minstrel Performer
- ❧ Student/Desegregator
- ❧ Nonprofit Employee
- ❧ Soldier

Roles: Family Members



- ❧ Family of Villager
- ❧ Family of Slave
- ❧ Family of Patient/Medical Subject
- ❧ Family of Police Brutality Victim
- ❧ Family of Home Owner
- ❧ Family of Black Minstrel Performer
- ❧ Family of Student/Desegregator
- ❧ Family of Nonprofit Employee
- ❧ Family of Soldier

*“Black people have seen the worst
of America, yet, somehow, we still
believe in its best.” – Nikole
Hannah Jones, 1619 Project*



Thank you for making space to grow & heal.

