

# ***CHECK YOUR PRIVILEGE – Final Draft***

*Created by Stephanie Sandberg and the Cast at Western Michigan University*

## **MOMENT I**

**Indicated by the actors' names.**

## **MOMENT II**

Heather - Tour guide  
Eddie - (CAMERON)  
Michael - (EPHRAIM)  
Eddie - (ISAIAH)  
Tamsen - (DINAH)  
Landon - (JOSH)  
Michael - (CRAIG)  
Michael - (COLE)  
Justin - (HANK)  
Justin - (BRANDON)  
Landon - (STEFAN)  
Natashia - (JASMINE)  
Asia - (VANESSA)

## **MOMENT III**

Jose - (DIEGO)  
Natashia - (TRISH)  
Landon - (CONNOR)  
Tamsen - (DINAH)  
Justin - (BRANDON)  
Asia - (VANESSA)

## **MOMENT IV**

Jose - (LUIS)  
Asia - (VANESSA)  
Justin - (QUENTIN)  
Michael - (SEAN)  
Landon - (JOSH)  
Ana - (ISABEL)  
Eddie - (ISAIAH)  
Heather - (ANNIE)

**MOMENT V**

Asia - (NADIRA)  
Shuyuan - (LIEN)  
Eddie - (DREW)  
Natashia - (JASMINE)  
Eddie - (CAMERON)  
Ana - (FLORA)  
Natashia - (KAYLA)  
Justin - (BRANDON)

**MOMENT VI**

Asia - (VANESSA)  
Natashia - (FEMI)  
Ana - (FLORA)  
Eddie - (CAMERON)  
Justin - (BRANDON)  
Michael - (SEAN)  
Natashia - (TIERRA)

**MOMENT VII**

Michael - (SEAN)  
Heather - (ANNIE)  
Jose - (COLE)  
Eddie - (ISAIAH)  
Shuyuan - (LIEN)  
Ana - (FLORA)  
Natashia - (NATALIE)  
Tamsen - (DINAH)  
Asia - (VANESSA)  
Landon - (JOSH)  
Justin - (BRANDON)

## MOMENT I

**Space Configuration:** *Theatre in the Round. Paper covers the upper section of the balcony in long sheets, the paper is blank and serves as a projection surface for the two fixed projectors.*

*The actors have designated seats reserved at the edges of each audience section where their props and costume pieces are stored for use during the performance.*

*An actor with an iPhone films people entering the space and a second actor projects them onto surfaces around the space, the white paper surfaces. The Actors are in and around the space greeting the audience members as they arrive, welcoming them to the performance experience of CHECK YOUR PRIVILEGE. Three actors are assigned to each section of audience and, as the audience enters, the actors give them each a piece of paper and a pencil and ask them to write down their definition of privilege.*

*Projection Surface A: Definition of Privilege from Webster's Dictionary*

*Projection Surface B: Definition of Privilege from Oxford English Dictionary -- the etymology of the word.*

*Projection Surface C: Filming people coming in UNTIL, at an agreed upon moment, all the actors sit in their designated seats at the edges of their sections. Natashia, who has been filming the audience, turns the camera on herself in the blackout and speaks. We see her image projected across the stage floor. She stands and walks across the space stepping into the image. The play begins.*

*In this first section, the definitions of privilege should overlap chorally where there are similar words that could be spoken at the same time.*

*Projected on the two fixed projectors are the definitions of privilege collected from the audience during the pre-show.*

*As this moment continues the actors pass the handheld projector and camera phone around, projecting the "selfie" video onto the actor filming themselves.*

**Natashia:** I feel like privilege is... uh-I have too many definitions of privilege.

**Eddie:** Well it's sort of easy. It's like from the day you're born. Certain things are made available to you and certain things aren't.

**Asia:** I think of the term privilege as freedom.

**Michael:** privilege to me is being untouchable.

**Shuyuan:** The difference between what you can do with ease, and what you have to fight for.

**Tamsen:** it's like opportunities. Another word for opportunity.

**Natashia:** an opportunity or something that is given, a benefit given to an individual or community or a population of individuals.

**Shuyuan:** Oh, privilege is something that's given.

**Eddie:** being free to.... Bu... uh... having access to the rights that other people have access to.

**Landon:** Access. I think about privilege I think about having access to resources and things that you need, to get to where you wanna be.

**Michael-** (confident) I think of privilege is something that is not offered for everybody. It's something that you (clears throat) are offered.

**Landon:** the fortunate nature of having something handed to you, um without having to do the work to get it.

**Natashia:** I think uh... it's the mani... manifestation of specific... benefits that you've been afforded whether or not they are *deserved*? You just... have them... by default.

**Ana:** 'What I honestly think privilege is I never thought about it.'

**Landon:** Privilege... Privilege is... Let me- let me ponder about this for a... a hot second.

**Michael:** I guess it's when an individual or a group, um, holds power or sway, um, based upon some arbitrary fact of their existence.

**Heather:** an advantage that you get for an arbitrary reason?

**Asia:** It just feels negative in my body and I don't know why.

**Shuyuan:** It sounds very... like, hoity toity. kinda Like sounds high up there sort of stuck up. Kind of nasty.

**Tamsen:** white wonder-bread privilege. It makes my mouth taste like pasty mayonnaise just thinking about it.

**Michael.:** Privilege really depends on perspective.

**Jose:** it all depends on the individual.

**Natashia:** I mean, I am *the* most minority of minorities, so... I'm even left-handed (laugh), so, yeah, so it's it's it's like *woah* I'm like super minority

**Asia:** SCWAMP (Straight Christian White Able-bodied Male Property holders).

**Natashia:** (whispers) privilege... Everything I don't have.

**Justin:** Privilege is that THING that you can never put your finger on about what it means to be white, male, middle slash upper middle class and not to have to care about a goddamn thing.

**Natashia:** It's like almost having the upper hand in a situation or in a particular, yeah, in like a particular situation without even knowing it.

**Ana:** I guess it's like being blessed.

**Shuyuan:** But when I hear the word privilege, I think more of an honor.

**Ana:** Privilege... immediately, I think of money.

**Eddie:** But it's not just money, ya know, there's racial aspect too.

**Tamsen:** privilege means having the luxury to be unaware of inequalities that benefit you.

**Justin:** It is oblivion.

**Heather:** You don't, realize... you have privilege until... you *don't* have it. It's like a *numb* privilege, and... once that privilege is taken away from you...

**Michael:** It's perfectly possible to possess a great deal of privilege and not see it in the sense that um you know, 'oh well my grandfather pulled himself up by his bootstraps.' well tha-that might be but you know did your grandfather buy his first house as a result of redlining in the forties and fifties?

**Heather:** like there are so many things that like *just* because you ended up zoned for one school and the way you ended up zoned for that school was because you lived in *this* neighborhood, then you're gonna have more opportunities than the kids who got zoned for the *other* school in your county.

**Michael:** It was perfectly legal to draw a red line around neighborhoods and say no colored here, um where the guidelines about home ownership were literally written to exclude groups of people.

**Heather:** Like that's *totally* arbitrary, but that's, I think that's privilege. the luck of the draw kind of privilege.

**Michael:** You can boot straps all you want but what if you're one of the people who have taken advantage of the systemic discrimination. So to me it's like an invisible hand that lifts you up that you may or may not be aware of.

**Heather:** I think that that's the kind of privilege that we need to start being more careful about... I think in *America*.

**Justin:** privilege to me is white America. It's not something that everyone has, obviously, because it wouldn't be privilege.

**Eddie:** ya know, like, as a black man, can I walk into... can I go wherever... I wanna go. Would this university accept me regardless of the color of my skin?

**Justin:** Privilege is unfair, it's unjust, and people that have it, they don't necessarily choose it, *it* chooses.

***The actors sit in a circle as Asia walks the perimeter of the outer space filming herself, as Landon projects it onto the paper.***

**Michael:** Like I uh I understand that and I don't wanna abuse that but it's like, 'wow like okay damn like I there are a lot of difficulties that like I do not necessarily have to go through myself- Which is fucked.

**Natashia:** Like For example I just realized that because I grew up with both of my parents I was privileged. Like I didn't realize that's a particular privilege. You know what I mean? I mean that never even crossed my mind.

**Asia:** Privilege. Privilege is not needing...not even a little bit needing...to justify your existence. You can just BE and you do not have to think about it. You can just DO and you do not have to think about it. Whether you'll be accepted or whatnot. Check it.

**Justin:** I'm proud to be who I am, but at the same time you can't deny the fact that if I was born white, if I was born rich I would be in a better position in life then I am now. No doubt, no doubt in my mind.

**Asia:** Lemme tell you a story about privilege here at WMU. I and another guy I know...he and I have the same job...different departments. I'm brown. He's whitey-peach. He leaves work early all the time. All the time. I cannot.

**Shuyuan:** Cannot!

**Ana:** Cannot!

**Natashia:** Cannot!

**Asia:** You know what would happen to me? You know what? I know you know what. Why doesn't he have to think about it? Privilege. Check it.

**Tamsen:** If you're part of a dominant group, you get to feel "normal." That's the kind of privilege I run-into here in West Michigan. There is one dominant way of life.

**Heather:** Married.

**Shuyuan:** Hetero.

**Michael:** With kids.

**Eddie:** Church goes.

**Ana:** White.

**Heather/Shuyuan/Michael/Eddie/Ana:** Et cetera.

**Tamsen:** And it's SO dominant that everyone who fits it, thinks it really is just normal. They don't think about other ways of life as viable or important, because only weirdos do those.

**Asia:** Sometimes it's a privilege to be able to walk down the street in the morning. You know what I'm saying? You know, like a lot of kids from my high school, they had cars, everyone had cars, but in another country you know like people my age, we lucky to get some water.

***Asia penetrates the circle and hand the camera phone to Jose, as Landon projects his image onto the backs of the sitting ensemble members.***

**Jose:** In my family privilege in Spanish provolejio which umm we use it as a synonym for a blessing ummm . I grew up in Guatemala City aaannn we would go around central America just traveling to different churches helping with poverty. I would play with these kids, who didn't have shoes or didn't eat or ... ummm you could tell the they were going through some things and sometimes I would get mad at my mom and be like "mom I wanna leave" and she would say "you are very privileged to be here. You are privileged in the sense that you are blessed." and so privilege doesn't necessarily have a bad connotation. it means to me a blessing, you are blessed.

**Moment II: Why are we here? The status-quo. Everything is fine.**

*We hear, in the transition, the harmonic humming of the Western Michigan University Alma Mater. The cast forms a tour group assembling for a tour of the University. An actor steps forward as the tour guide holding a placard that reads "The character of the tour guide is based on actual Western Michigan University tours and tour guides," which is filmed and projected by the fixed projectors. The tour guide acts as a kind of "salesperson" for the University...energetic, customizing the product to the client. One of the cast members carries the iPhone and films the tour and "takes pictures" of things along the way. Another cast member carries the projector and projects those pictures onto various surfaces. She removes the placard revealing herself, and the tour begins. Interrupting the music-*

**Tour Guide:** Welcome to Western Michigan University! We are home to over 250 programs, including the third largest Aviation and second largest mechanical engineering programs in the nation. We are also one of the top 20 business schools and one of the top ten producers of teachers in the nation. But more of that later! Who's ready to get started?

**OVERENTHUSIASTIC FATHER:** Me! I am!

**EMBARRASSED DAUGHTER:** Dad!

*Here, actors exit the tour group and become their characters.*

**CAMERON:** I am a sophomore here at western and my experience at the university so far has been everything that I kind of wanted as as a as a college experience...

**EPHRAIM:** Uhhh I think it's a very friendly welcoming environment, I'd say it's very easy to kind of jump in and fit in.

**CAMERON:** It's pretty diverse for the most part. Um I think every ethnicity or somewhat is kind of represented here and so far it's been pretty good times. **I do see true equality on campus. I feel like it exists in a way I can't put my finger on... There's enough to make me content...** I feel like Western does a... tries to do a good job... I feel like that's enough.

**Tour Guide:** We are now passing Wood Hall. Home to many of our science classes. And if you look to your right you'll see the Lee Honors College. Western Michigan is a Carnegie Research institution **which means that every professor here is required to do some level of research.** There are only five of these institutions in the state and of these five, WMU offers the lowest tuition! And our professors here are always looking for students to help with their research!

**CRAIG:** I feel like, like this is a community that's more open than others, but other than that I wouldn't really, in general on a, on a social scale, I guess, I wouldn't really know the challenges



**ISAIAH:** maybe this place really is just diverse.

**DINAH:** This place is fucking flat...and I mean that in the sense of there are no mountains...and I mean that in the sense that there is this level of acceptable status quo mediocrity with smiles and "hello how are you's?"

**JOSH:** We aren't very good at racial diversity around here, we have a 50 on the dissimilarity index, in terms of the differences between white people and people of color.

***A definition of the dissimilarity index is written on one of the white boards off stage and projected onto the paper.***

**DINAH:** When I came to this university, it was uncanny to me that a place of higher learning would just be so quietly accepting of the "well, this is the way things are" attitude toward life.

**JOSH:** This place is just whiteness, in attitude and ideology.

**Tour Guide:** And now, here we are at the center of campus, also known as the echo point. A common meeting place for students because from here, every edge of campus is roughly a fifteen minute walk. If you look up, you'll see nine flagpoles. We rotate these flags periodically to showcase each of the over ninety countries represented here at WMU!

**Question:** Why are there three American flags?

**Tour guide:** Oh, um. I actually don't know. That's a very good question.

**JOSH:** We're bringing a lot of international students to fulfill our diversity quotas, to pad our diversity.

**COLE:** both Kalamazoo and Western have got, you know, things are mostly homogeneous and then when they aren't homogeneous you have this sort of sense of like, ah like tokenistic over compensation

**JOSH:** We spend so much time with the white population, who are resistant to acknowledging white privilege that I am not sure students of color are getting anything out of the class...because this is not a new idea for them.

**DINAH:** From what I gather from both groups, when there's not a critical mass and you are seen as representing whatever ethnicity you come from, you end up speaking for all Hispanics and all African Americans and nobody wants to do that.

**COLE:** Like oh well we can't-we're gonna have diversity so we're gonna invite a black person or we're gonna do this or do this one thing and that's gonna it's gonna make everything better but then there's this other stuff that's not really being addressed.

**DINAH:** Certainly, I don't think we're doing as much as we could be... but then at the same time it's got to suck for minority students whether you're an international student or a racial ethnic minority living in the united states, coming to a campus, and that campus wants to use you as a number.

**COLE:** I think there's a there's a sense you know, I think especially among white people, that there's this sense of like well I haven't personally oppressed anyone so why should I pay for pay for sins of the past?

**JOSH:** I think the University could do more to facilitate cross racial cross cultural interaction but before they do that, they do need to do more with recruiting so there's some kind of critical mass rather than having just a small percentage of minority students on campus and then holding them up as this example of how diverse of an institution we are now.

**Tour Guide:** We are now about to enter the Bernhard Center. Home to many of our offices including our Registered Student Organization headquarters. Here at WMU, there's a plethora of ways to get involved. We have roughly 300 registered student organizations for you to join. And if somehow, your needs aren't met by any of these organizations, you can always start your own! All it takes is two students and a constitution!

**HANK:** Absolutely Western not only has somewhere for everyone to fit it is open to create something new always so even if there isn't somewhere for you to fit you can create that somewhere. Most definitely. You can make things happen here.

**JOSH:** I'm sure we're taking kids that got good grades in high school and were involved in a lot of activities, but they are most of them from Michigan, and most from rural or middle sized cities. Their worlds are small and so we try to engage them. Put them in another person's shoes, so to speak.

**Tour Guide:** So now, I'd like to open it up to questions. Is there anything anyone is dying to know about WMU?

**Question:** How is the math program here?

**Tour guide:** Oh! We have a great program here!

**Question:** What about English?

**Tour guide:** You know, that's a really strong one too!

**Question:** Africana Studies?

**Tour guide:** Absolutely! It's a great major!

**JOSH:** The Africana-studies program has closed here. It was a program, not a department, and it was dismantled. So now there is not that, not even that one program.

**Question:** Is there anything you don't like about Western Michigan University?

**Tour guide:** Wow! That's a really cool question. Um, I guess I'd have to say the weather.

**BRANDON:** Around here, and I would say at most institutions of higher learning in this country, there is a sameness about things these days. Just a live and let live. Just a "that's the way things are" so don't nobody rock the boat.

**DINAH:** "This is the way things are..." that bullshit statement...you know what it means? It means, quite simply, this – that if you just smile and stare straight ahead and act like everything's ok, then nothing can get you or get to you. And you can just sing, "merrily we roll along" while the world goes to hell. And that is not what a place of higher learning should be.

**JOSH:** We have a majority of white population and the majority of those whites here and I think, prefer to be in predominantly white environments. This comes out in the classroom quite a bit. That's just what they prefer.

**Question:** Well, I'm from Michigan. I think I can handle the weather. Is there anything else?

**Tour guide:** ...Parking. Parking can be an issue.

**BRANDON:** Here's the problem with that sameness. It's not the same. There are gross inequalities. There are just like ways of being that leave some people just on the brink of survival and others thriving.

**JOSH:** We're 80% white...and this 80 % of white kids coming from all white towns whose parents have told them, "we're where we are because we've worked harder than other people" so we have to break through that. It's not just that you've worked hard...the color of your skin is helping you out in ways you can clearly see.

**BRANDON:** Some would say, well that's just about economics but I say no, it is disproportionately about race AND economics. You cannot separate the two. They are married and never getting a divorce.

**Question:** How are the academics here? Would you say everyone here is given a fair shot?

**Tour Guide:** Wow so many great questions. I very much believe this to be a great university where absolutely anyone can succeed.

**JOSH:** If you look at schools like us across the country, we are doing as good or better, but it's the whole system that privileges whites to the extent that you can fill a university with 80% white people so then, this idea of coming to the university as place to get more cultured ideas and perspectives from all over the world, it doesn't really happen, it doesn't really take place like that here.

**Question:** How are the parties! Like are they legit?

**Tour guide:** Haha, well we get that question a lot. I'll say that your time here will be what you make of it.

**HANK:** Man the weekend life here is phenomenal like obviously a privilege to anyone, anyone that can see this wha-what goes on you know during the weekend it its' jaw dropping...

**EPHRAIM:** Um it's your typical college campus

**HANK:** People still stick together like uh the black crowd still sticks with the black crowd the Dominicans you know they stick together the white people they stick together

**JOSH:** I had a couple kids who were all in the same class, and they all left a party, right here on campus. These white kids got stopped by the police leaving the party and just got a warning. The African American students got stopped and they got "minor in possession of alcohol" tickets, but they were all minors, all underage, all drinking, all in possession. I have to think, there's got to be a policy, but why did the white kids get let go? Unequal distribution of punishment.

**HANK:** But at the end of the day no matter what if you're all at a party you know it's gonna be a good time everyone's gonna get along it's not gonna be you know like oh us vs. them its gonna be 'yo let's party what's up.'

***A rapid fire dance party ensues. The actor with the camera phone stops the party with his question.***

**Question:** What about diversity?

**Tour guide:** Oh, um, that's a really... interesting question. Well, like I said, we do have over ninety countries represented here. So it's a very diverse place. Like, for example, we have a very large Dominican population. **And we are one of the few universities in the nation to offer each of the Divine Nine. The nine major African American fraternities.**

**Follow-up Question:** But do people get along?

**Tour guide:** Oh, absolutely. People here are really great!

**EPHRAIM:** I mean like, people aren't mean, you know, I I haven't dealt with like people blatantly being assholes around campus and you know and if they are then everyone else kind of regards them as such and everyone moves on.

**STEFAN:** If... a group of people was targeted on Western grounds, the students would... throw a fit. (pause) Thank God. Thank. God. Maybe I'm wrong... maybe I'm living in a bubble!... but I don't think so.

**JASMINE:** I think everything's been-I think everyone has this opportunity to do well here no matter what, if that makes sense.

**COLE:** 'Well, I haven't perceived so it doesn't really happen' but I don't think people take the step beyond to see well you don't have to have personally done stuff for the injustice to exist, you know what I mean?

**VANESSA:** For the most part it feels like there is just this choice here on whether or not you want to help or not. It's a choice and I wonder if it's fair.

**JOSH:** I think there's a lot of confusion about the extent to which we are all impacted by racism. The attitudes are there, referring to people as ghetto or places as ghetto...Or mothers tightening their hands around their kids when they pass a black person. There's no critical thinking skills applied to these behaviors until they get into college, into my class, and that's probably not enough.

**VANESSA:** Couldn't it be required? To be a part of this conversation about race. What would happen if these things were required of us?

**JOSH:** Every student who enters this campus needs one course on this...one place where they can confront this in themselves.

**Tour Guide:** Well, that concludes our tour. Please fill out your surveys and let us know how we did! We hope you've enjoyed your time visiting Western Michigan University.

**Moment III: The University – the great equalizer – is it doing its job?**

*The actors spread out throughout the space, first collecting their props for this scene. In the transition we hear the chime of the campus clock. Three actors sit center armed with a piece of portable white board, a dry-erase marker, and a cloth to erase with. They continually, throughout the scene, write down statistics to be filmed and projected. Other actors sit throughout the space. Some on the steps next to the audience and others in one of the rolling chairs stationed in each corner. Whenever there is a shared line the actor whose monologue it is not films themselves and is projected onto a whiteboard help over the face of the actor giving the monologue. Throughout the scene the entire company stands and rotates positions.*

**TRISH:** We look at four separate things when we are looking at people who are applying to the university. The first thing of course is GPA, and then we look at your test scores, the ACT or SAT, what classes you took, and then we also look at trends in grades.

**CONNOR:** They're letting in 80% of people that apply, did you know that? Why would you let 80% of applicants into a university when they're actually letting in functionally illiterate people, um literally people who can't write sentences?

**DINAH:** What I see on a consistent, constant basis is students who are severely underprepared for their college experience....and what I could clarify here about this underprepared-ness is that it means this student may not be able to write a complete sentence with the noun, verb, adverbs, pronouns, adjectives, etc in the proper rightful spaces. Simply put, they cannot fucking write.

**CONNOR:** If we're going to let in that many people we need remedial programs. We need to require basic grammar composition. If you can't pass a literacy test which--bottom line I think you need to be literate to start college, I don't think college is the place to start.

**TRISH:** It's all on the individual student. If it's a situation where maybe their GPA is on the cusp and their ACT, SAT score wasn't great we do have a certain amount of programs that you can enter that are designed to sort of aid you in, in figuring out college.

**VANESSA:** Lemme tell you my story, that might help. So, I grew up in Dee-troit... We were super poor and ...but...we never used like government assistance or nothing, uh anything like that. We struggled and we did it with dignity. And it was my dad and mom's dream (or really my step-dad) that I would go ta college cause they didn't...they didn't have the chance.

**BRANDON:** I was raised in Detroit, and my Grandma, she raised me and she made me go to school every day. My dad, he didn't finish high school, but eventually got his GED and he always said that education was the most important thing. That education was the great equalizer that would fix it all...racism, sexism, poverty...you name it.

**DIEGO:** From when I was a very small boy, my mother and father worked every day in the fields or in...sometimes in the factories. We lived in Texas first, that's where we crossed. In Michigan, we worked the seasons and my mom, she cleaned houses or at hotels in the winter. With my older brothers and sisters, she hadn't made a stink about them going to school,

but she did with me... needed me to learn better English to help, so I worked still with her in the fields in summer and I went to school the rest of the time.

**BRANDON:** One time, I did not want to go to school...well, more than one time, but we don't need to talk about that. Anyway, this one time my Grandma (Granny ma we called her)...anyway Granny ma comes in to my room and I am pretending to be asleep and sick because I don't want to go to school. So she comes into my room and she grabs me, yanks me by the feet out of bed so fast and I landed hard on my back side and she says, "BRANDON...you get to school. School's the only thing you got to bring you hope...besides me and your daddy and Jesus. That's all you got."

**VANESSA:** And yeah, so they ahhh...they ahhh wanted in the worst way for me ta go to college cause that was THE THING. You know..this one time...this one time my dad, I can just remember that he got in a fight at work... And I 'member he saying to me that, "you know, I wouldn't be so angry, I wouldn't have this anger or this rage inside 'o me if I had just gone to college."

**BRANDON:** I hit my butt so hard when I landed that I think I broke something, but I never really argued with [Granny Ma] again about school. She followed me there sometimes, just walking down the block behind me to make sure I walked through the gates. And she checked up too.

**VANESSA:** And he believed that. He believed that he would be better off and not carrying round so much rage. Now, I do not know...I DO NOT KNOW...if that is true, but it's what he felt, so ya know, it's true for him at least. Anyways, he thought that I had to go. My mom thought I had to go.

**DIEGO:** The summer before my senior year, I remember that there was this guy who had come to my high school to talk to us, the migrant worker kids, about going to college. Nobody had ever talked to me about this. He was the first one...and he was talking about this CAMP program – College Assistance Migrant Program – that I could get a scholarship for my first year and that was cool. My mom, I told her about it and she needed me to work, to meet the bills and try to buy a house also.

**BRANDON:** See, that's what a lot of folks is missing...someone who is following them, watching, checking up. I see white kids had that a lot of the time, not all the time, but a lot of the time, and that's a difference...someone riding your ass. That's a kind of privilege too.

**TRISH:** We do have a certain amount of programs that you can enter at the beginning of your college career that are designed to sort of aid you. For example one program is geared

towards like, first generation students. Students whose parents didn't go to college. Another is, students that come from, come from low income families. Another area is students that are, are kinda making this financial aid thing work, you know, for themselves.

**DIEGO:** And the summer of that year, this guy, the same guy...the one who came to my school, he came to the fields and they found me and wanted to talk to me about staying in school. Cause I was gonna drop out and try to take GED later, and this guy was like, no Diego, you need to finish. You're smart. You got a high score on the Math ACT and you got good grades in school and you can come to Western Michigan University and be a part of CAMP. So, that's what I did. My mom, she really didn't want me to. I did anyway.

**VANESSA:** And so I was going to this public school where I was getting A's and so I was thinking that I wanted to be a doctor or physician's assistant or something, work in ER. I don't know...just seemed like a smart job. Then I took my, ah, my, ah, my ACT and I ...yeah...yup, I got a really average score like 21 or something, something like that. Whatever average is. And so I went to Western, because they took me and because it was the best place I could go.

**DINAH:** This University is inheriting the woes and wails and wrongs of an entirely effed-up education system, and here we are, smiling, trying to make things right.

**CONNOR:** I do think it's unethical for the university to accept these people and say, "come here, you're welcome, you are part of our culture," and then expel them 3 semesters later, after they've gotten 12,000 dollars out of them, right? **It's about milking them for their money knowing that they're doomed to fail. It's despicable.**

**DIEGO:** I came to Western and I took classes. There was the support of the school and the CAMP mentors... it was hard. I knew then that I was very far behind because I took the classes and got low grades on my papers. D's and F's.

**VANESSA:** Everyone in the family was so excited that me, their little girl, was going to be the first person in the family to go ta college...COLLEGE. And I was excited too, until I failed my first test in biology. Failed it. Flat.

**TRISH:** Ummm there are what I would call maybe certain loop holes, ummm, for example the essay portion of our application. We do have an essay. It is both completely open ended and actually optional. So if there is a high school that is letting students skate by, you know what I mean. We have no way of recognizing that.

**CONNOR:** I think if yea we just have to have a program for people that are seriously playing catch up and not professors looking the other way and putting kids in courses that are considered easy. It's unethical. Don't promise someone an education and take it away from them.



**DIEGO:** And at first my response was, just go home. Cause when I talked to my mom, that's what she wanted. And my sisters would yell at me on the phone too about how I wasn't being the man of the family. Machismo...this is a big part of how I was supposed to be...to be tough, to be the one in charge. I went home that first summer and worked asparagus, strawberries and into August and when it was time to go back to school, I didn't go that second year. At the time, my mom, she just needed me and there was this pressure to stay through harvest.

**VANESSA:** And I think that I was in culture shock a bit cause they made it sound like it was going to be different than I thought...like I thought it would be just like high school. I found out that you had to talk different here...you had to walk different here...you couldn't just do the same things you did before to get to some level or some... some kinda success. And no way, no way did my high school (or my middle school or my baby school) prepare me for this. In no way, no way.

**DIEGO:** But I went back to Western second semester, in winter and I had this experience where I was walking across the middle part of campus, and it was snowing and blowing snow and I knew I wasn't going to stay there. I felt alone and like it wasn't gonna get better and I was depressed, low. And dark. And I just wanted to be with family. Where it is warm, where there is light.

**VANESSA:** On paper, I looked like I was gonna be ok in college...like I wouldn't need no extra help or whatever....tutoring and stuff, but I needed it.

**TRISH:** Our average GPA is like a 3.3 and our average ACT is a 20 of the people that we're accepting, and yet, we don't have full retention. With an average GPA and ACT like that, the average should be excelling, and I don't think that that's necessarily the case.

**DINAH:** One student I had last semester, she wrote a paper that was one paragraph in length when it was assigned as a three page informative essay. One paragraph vs. three pages. I called the student into my office and the student said that she thought she had enough information in the one paragraph, so she did not need to write more. What's going on here? Is the student being defiant? No. Is this the student's fault? Ultimately, no. It rests not solely on the individual. It rests on a system that allowed this young woman to sneak on through to the other side of a high school diploma, without the proper training to succeed.

**VANESSA:** So now I'm second guessing myself. Wondering if I can make it and my mom, she says I can, I can. My dad, he says I can, I can. But I am on the brink...the very precipice o' the edge of droppin' out.

**DIEGO:** I wanted to be smart, to get the success and I felt like I just couldn't get the good grades. I did have the strength to overcome some things, but there are these barriers in our education system and it sometimes, well to me it feels like there is not a ladder to climb over. The CAMP program is a ladder and there are some other programs but we need help.

**VANESSA:** I did drop out, semester to semester I wouldn't make it. Changed my major to something I could handle. But shouldn't I have been able to handle those science and math courses?

**DINAH:** It is the systemic racism of the education system in this country that allows some to go to schools where real teaching is happening and students don't sneak through and some to go to schools where they shoulder shrug, "just pass 'em so they're outta our hair". It is not a fair and equal system. With whom rests the fault?

**VANESSA:** Whose fault is that....whose fault is that that ...that I was not prepared. No way prepared? Whose?

**TRISH:** We have solutions, you know, and suggestions, and ways to help you and things to say, remind you, oh hey there might be a scholarship here, and hey there's this, you know, stuff like that.

**VANESSA:** They think, they think they're doing a good job with making it accessible and they sometimes are...they sometimes are. But it wasn't that way for me.

**TRISH:** But if they don't ask then we don't know that they're struggling, we don't know that someone needs that information unless they come to us and they ask.

**DIEGO:** I didn't ask for help because I wanted to find the help in myself.

**VANESSA:** I did not know how to ask for help. I did not want to ask for help. So many kids here, like me...low income, black or brown, cannot make it without this kinda help...but to ask for it is hard, and to even know who to ask.

**TRISH:** I think that the way a place feels, how incredibly institutional it can feel is very intimidating. I get a lot of calls, you know in the office with questions like, "okay, I've applied what next," you know, like "what do I do now," and we're more than happy to answer those, but I think for every call for someone asking that and they figure it out, how many calls do I not get, you know what I mean.

**DIEGO:** What I needed, more than anything is for someone to help me learn to ask for help and I didn't do that until I left Western. **I am fine.** Western is a good place, but they didn't have the hands I needed and so I moved. And I went to junior college and took a few classes at GVSU and other places, and **I'm getting** Business certificate degree from the University of Phoenix. I am going to buy farms and make work better for my family and the people who are coming here to work. And that's what I am doing...what I am going to do.

**VANESSA:** Drop out. Drop in. That was me. And I eventually made it...majoring in something else, but I still cannot say, cannot say ...uh...cannot say that this...that this was... is what my gift is. **I graduated and got a job in a company and hated it and said, I want to work in education in some way. And So...this job I have now with running an office for the school....for WMU. It's OK.** It's not really who I AM. Somewhere there inside me still...still...inside me...is that doctor that I was supposed to be able to become.

**Moment IV: Classroom situations - Privilege being played out in the classroom.**

*Two of the rolling chairs shoot into the center of the space. The actor place them side by side, two in each corner of the diagonal. In the center actors become students, using their whiteboards as desks. In this section when there is a shared line the face of the actors whose monologue it is not is projected on a white board the actors giving the monologue holds (anywhere but their face.) As the actors in the center transition from classroom to classroom they shift their bodies to face different areas of the space.*

**LUIS:** No matter what class you in. It's mostly dominated by ONE RACE, which is Euro-Americans. So every time you get ready, a question is asked and you want to raise your hand, the thought of "oh man if I get this wrong they're going to stereotype me or judge me." or something like. When *they* don't have to think about that.

**VANESSA:** I read about this the other day. The conspiracy of silence. And I've seen it. I've seen it.

**LUIS:** A great example would be when you're in a class and... um... those who... a huge selection of lecture halls, say a 350 seats, and those at the front of the classroom in the auditorium can see, they can see the professor a lot differently than those in the back.

**VANESSA:** I was taking this class about urban business or urban issues and there were a bunch of black students in this particular class because well...the subject matter I guess. And we had to write about ourselves and how race had impacted our lives, how it had made our lives harder, and the professor was not happy with us...we didn't give enough information, at least that's what he said.

**LUIS:** Those in front can only see what's in front of them, they can't see what's in the back of 'em but those in the back can see what those people in the front CAN see AND what they can't see. **So the ones at front don't have to worry about what's behind them but the ones in the back worry about what's in the front and back.** They know things that those in the front would never and might never know.

**VANESSA:** And this girl in the class who was either white or middle-eastern, she said that the reason the responses weren't good is because it's not a race issue, that everyone goes through hardships because they're female or have one leg or are blind. And then a white guy he

says...these things are class issues not race issues. Class issues. And he asks, "why does everything have to be about race?"

**QUENTIN:** Sometimes students will say things that are racist. I had a student write a poem, uh, from the perspective of a soldier and he kept saying "Haji, I wanna kill these fucking Haji's" And it wasn't done in a way that was critiquing the way the soldier was using the word. The poem was on the soldier's side.

**VANESSA:** I lost it, and I just said to him that he had no idea what he was talking about, that he had "no idea what it meant to be black in America or anywhere else for that matter." And someone else asked him, "Do you know what it means that you have white skin? Do you have any idea at all?"

**QUENTIN:** And I was like, "Okay, look. You can't, I mean, you can't use this slur, uh, in your poem." But a lot of times, especially here, like I found that students, **largely white students**, will... like there's no authority to call something racist unless you aren't white. Like that's my perception that these students have that idea. So it's like, "Well, Mr. Rahal, like, who cares?"

**VANESSA:** And then one of the black guys in the class just said, "They will never get it. Never get it at all. They don't have to get it. They're white." And that was it...the class kinda exploded and one chick was crying and another one was comforting her and the white guy just got up and left. And well...it was polarizing.

**QUENTIN:** Sometimes when I point out things that are racist or prejudice, I follow it up by – especially if it's against Arabs – I say, "Well, I'm Arab."

**SEAN:** A lot of white students consider it impolite ever to bring up race. It's what they call playing the race card which I think is the dumbest expression I've ever heard. Um and what they usually I think mean is taking a stance of victimization and shutting down the conversation by saying I will always be the victim you will always be the oppressor.

**QUENTIN:** It shuts down the conversation but it also makes people realize that perhaps their preconceptions about Arabs are incorrect.

**VANESSA:** "Why can't we talk about it?" See white people cannot talk about this stuff. "It's scary stuff." Why are white people so scared to talk about race?

**JOSH:** I've had situations where there were majority white students in class, which is usual, and the minority students might be trying to say something, but the white students are just "louding them out" just drowning them out with their multiple voices.

***We hear a recording of the below Spanish text, and as the actress begins speaking the translation the recording fades to underscore her text.***

**ISABEL:** En la morning class, yo tengo una English class y estaba hablando de nuestro papers. Y yo escribí sobre como yo piscaba en el labor. Y ellos me dijeron "Why did you pick this topic?" Y yo no les dije porque. Yo dije "Pues no mas..."

**Translation ISABEL:** In my morning class, I have an English class, and we were talking about our papers. And I had written about how I worked in the fields. And they said to me "Why did you pick this topic?" And I didn't tell them why. I just said "You know because."

**ISAIAH:** Um... I had... I had um... a student my very first semester here.... Who'd... um, who um, I mean she wasn't very engaged in the course. It was at eight o'clock in the morning, she was showing up and she was asleep... ya know... but every so often, ya know, she would raise her hand and contribute to the discussion, ummmm, and... she was the only per...student of color I had... that, that semester... um... and I felt like sometimes when she raised her hand to speak, people sort of just like rolled their eyes a little bit?

**ISABEL:** And this girl said "I could not imagine picking asparagus or apples." She was, se estaba riendo. And this African-American guy said "Yeah, I wouldn't do that. That's not worth it. People that do that, they should just get better jobs." And I was like "Yeahhhh." Yo no mas dije nada.

**Translation ISABEL:** And this girl said "I could not imagine picking asparagus or apples." She was, she was laughing. And this African-American guy said "Yeah, I wouldn't do that. That's not worth it. People that do that, they should just get better jobs." And I was like "Yeahhh" I just didn't say anything.

**ISAIAH:** Cuz they just saw, like, they saw... that she was less... dedicated to the course... but at the same time I, I I I I I, I had this understanding that they were also sort of judging her on, ya know race, like "oh, this is just what black girls do... in class" um... so that was a bit....

**ISABEL:** Es que yo se que trabajar allí, si es... If they could do something different, algo mas, something that they were getting paid to do, I'm not saying that our boss doesn't pay us. He pays us what everybody else is paying pero if they could do something else and get paid more money and actually get paid for what they do then they would if they could!

**Translation ISABEL:** If they could do something different, something better, something that they were getting paid to do, and I'm not saying that our boss doesn't pay us. He pays us what everybody else is paying but if they could do something else and get paid more money and actually get paid for what they do then they would! And it's not nothing to laugh about. I mean I did it my whole life so I felt that she was laughing at me, my life, who I am.

***The cast moves into a stylized “white privilege walk” line across one of the diagonals of the round.***

**NATASHIA:** If your primary ethnic identity is American, take one step forward.

**NATASHIA:** If you were never called names because of your race, class, gender, or sexual orientation, take one step back.

**NATASHIA:** If you were never ashamed or embarrassed of your clothes, house, car, etc., step forward.

**ANNIE:** For whatever reason the professor who is in charge of me and trained me had us do something called the privilege walk – And I think that if, especially if it’s done at the right moment in the semester, it can be a really great exercise. And the professor sort of sold this as, like, “You’re all about to get a lesson in how lucky you are.” Like, I know that I’m very lucky. So I didn’t have a problem personally with like the steps forward **and backward** that I was taking in the privilege walk but I had a couple of colleagues who, um, ended up in the very back at the end of the exercise and were, um, really upset. Like, they were very embarrassed that everyone could see that they were in the way back, like, “This is how hard my life has been.” And so, it was difficult for them. And then when we sort of talked about it as a class afterwards, um, their... their pain was minimized because it was not the kind of privilege that the professor had experienced. Like, um, our professor, um, basically said, um, that the, the two people that ended up in the very back, um, because they were white, their pain was not really as bad as the pain that she has experienced in her life. Like, she looked at one of my colleagues and said, “I’m sorry that you had to stand in the back and remember for ten minutes that when you were a kid your parents were too poor to feed you. Um, but, like, your – what is your ten minutes of discomfort in comparison to my 24/7 discomfort?” And that girl was basically shattered...

***The ensemble returns to a classroom formation, similar to the top of the scene.***

**SEAN:** When I teach, every year or two there’s somebody, usually a white male student, who even if he’s been pretty engaged in the class throughout, he’ll have a kind of breaking point toward the end of the semester and say ‘okay I’m the bad guy, I’m gonna be blamed for everything, I’m always gonna be blamed for slavery even though I didn’t do it.’

**JOSH:** There was this one white kid who was just horrible, just horrible, and another student, a female African American student from Grand Rapids confronted his racism and said, at the end of class one day she just said, “You know, you say alot of stupid things...you just talk and talk and talk and you don’t even know what you’re talking about and nobody has ever told you that so you just think that everything you’re saying is enlightening everyone.” She just went off on him for two to three minutes. And I was like, OK “Class dismissed.”

**SEAN:** I guess the simplistic version is that they accuse me of saying white people are bad and black are good. Um so I try to turn it into a discussion about power structure but there are often white peop-students who feel very injured. That they can't do anything right because they've been tainted with original sin of racism (laughs) and that's a terrible way to paralyze an argument. That's when people stop learning is when they say 'I can't win.'

**JOSH:** He was talking about how he doesn't have any white privilege and his family had to work for everything they had (even though he's getting a free education cause his dad's a professor.) He said clearly that racism doesn't exist. And he said this multiple times. And he was not being quiet about it; the volume of his voice and feeling as though he was entitled to speak about this, as loudly and as often as possible. So it was good that this student went off on him. She just finally had enough and told him what she thought.

**QUENTIN:** I think that the key to determining whether it's ignorance or racism is, if anybody calls it out, "Oh this is racist. This is why." I've always found that if a person is racist, they get really angry and defensive. And if it's ignorance they'll be like, "Oh, okay. I didn't understand."

**JOSH:** And he checked himself more carefully after that. You never know, you never know, what one teaching moment like that will do. It can change someone. It can change someone in the moment or it can change them years later. You never know.

**QUENTIN:** Not that there can't be teachable moments with racists, and not that racists...can't...be...changed? I think they can, right? I hope so.

**PROFESSORS:** Class dismissed.

*The ensemble exits leaving the space empty for the first time.*

### **Moment V. Identity**

**NADIRA enters. Two actors with camera enter to film her, her image projected onto the white paper by the fixed projectors. Two actors with the handheld projector and camera phone project a "yellow box" onto the actor playing LIEN as the scene progresses.**

**NADIRA:** I was born in Iraq, always during war, never do I remember there not being war. And now...the same. My family, we came to the US through the UNHCR – the refugee program because my Papa, he worked for the US government doing contract work, so they had to help us out...yes, because his life and our lives are threatened.

**LIEN:** I am an Asian-American. My grandparents came here first to New York and then to Michigan **where my family owns a couple of businesses and most of my family work in engineering on cars and stuff.** I graduated from Western just recently ...and my degree it's in sociology and social work. I had a good experience at Western in terms of my

education...and...well...maybe not the best experience with social stuff, and I don't know if it's caused by my own growing awareness of race and ethnicity issues. Or if the cause is more than just my perception.

**NADIRA:** The promise of the United States, of equality, this is a great promise...that all, women and all colors of people, all incomes of people, they all have the chance at something greater. You are not stuck here you know? **You are not only at one place your whole existence.** And here people help you, you know? I am not saying that my own people are not helping or helpful but war you know, it dragged us down, into pit of despair.

**LIEN:** When I came here, it was one of the first things I noticed that people assumed things. I look very Asian and so people, students and teachers assumed things. Put me in this box right away. **I read this book, *Yellow, a few years ago.* And I guess** I felt like I was placed in this yellow box, and this box it's like you're foreign and then it's like you're not foreign and it's like you don't know where you are. Where are you really from?

**NADIRA:** So, when we came here and I went to high school here, with basically no English, a little, but it was there. And but I did well in school. I got into Western Michigan University, and my family, my Papa they are proud because I am good at science, at engineering, which is what my Papa does. But I get in and they take me into a program here where I take this TOEFL exam and I score low, so I have to basically to take a year of special English. **This program is so good, and they treat me so good and basically they just re-teach me English.** And you know this program so good, you know and they make sure that I understand. And they are my...the girls at the side at games you know?....they are my cheerleaders and you need this you know?

**LIEN:** And I remember this on the first day of orientation, I am just walking to find one of my rooms, one of my sessions, and one of the orientation workers just comes up and asks me if I'm looking for the international student orientation. And I just look at him and I smiled and I walked away. What should I say? What action do you take? I didn't want to make **him** feel bad, because of **his** stereotyped assumption you know.

**NADIRA:** But it is not so good when I start to take the regular classes and basically, there is no longer that, what I call safety net of my cheerleaders and it is hard, you know? **It is difficult and I feel like....like....just lost that year.** **And when I come here,** I feel like the promises are broken and it is just... And I feel like this difficulty, where I am both visible and invisible at the same time because, especially when I wear the veil.

**LIEN:** Another time, and I'm a SOC major, and I am talking to some guys at lunch and it was like, that yellow box, again, and this assuming that I am an engineering major or in the sciences. And this guy, white guy, **just didn't seem to care or want to know who I was but I actually think he** thought I was a chemistry major and then, when I told him that I am not in the sciences but in sociology, he, right in front of me and as though this was not a problem at all....he tells me that



he just must have me mixed up with someone else because, and he makes a joke that we all look the same.

**NADIRA:** I wear the veil because it is my religion and my tradition in honoring Allah, and my people and basically tradition and my country. When I choose not to wear, it is not that it is because I dishonor my tradition or my religion, but because I actually well, I choose to do experiment. **Not to dishonor my family. But because I felt like when I wear it, I am this invisible visible invisible. So I do experiment** and for three days I do not wear it. And, when I wear it, it is like people either stare like with google, you know google eyes or they do not like to look and they just stare like basically past you.

**LIEN:** And he asks me, “how do you tell each other apart?” And what am I supposed to say to that? And I just swallowed it at that point, because I didn’t know what to say. But then later, I feel like I put myself into that yellow box because I played passive female and just laughed it off and didn’t say anything. And I should have. I should have.

**NADIRA:** People here so nice in general, but not always so nice in classrooms and just walking across the quad...I learn so fast that people can so easy ignore you and turn away. Here it is basically difficult and then when I don’t wear the veil, it is like I am different person basically. Anyway it is just that people talk to me, my professors ask me questions and invite me to participate, but when I wear the veil it is basically an invitation to make me invisible. Anyway so this is basically the problem, that I cannot be totally who I am, I cannot wear the veil and totally be participating because people cannot basically get past this and they treat me different. Wear the veil...treat me invisible. Don’t wear the veil...then they see me as a person rather than a religion.

**JASMINE:** I will say... I’ve been the first black friend for a lot of people... they’ve come from towns where they, just don’t have a black population at all, or they’ve never had friends who were black. **So like one or two people I was in a group with, they walked up to me and was like (she rubs her had all over the top of another actor’s head)...** and I was like, Okay! Now my turn! And I messed up their hair! Cuz it was just like, that’s just such an invasion of space... I don’t know what’s so special about it. It’s been on my head for twenty years (laughs).

**DREW:** it was, it was hard trying to not be this stereotype that white people or the mi, the majority viewed you as, and still fit in with the minorities. So it kinda put me in this weird middle place because I spoke with, like, I spoke proper English, you know I, I didn’t really use slang like that.

**JASMINE:** I’m known in the like “black community” at Western as being the black girl who hangs out with white people more... at the end of the day it’s like--I didn’t choose--I didn’t like purposely ‘I’m gonna have white friends,’ you know? Yea um and some of my fellow black students might call me like an “Oreo” which is a white person inside of a black person- So like as a negative connotation, saying like I think I’m white just because I speak... pretty eloquently.

Speaking English well should not be um a thing that white people do everyone can speak English well.

**CAMERON:** I think that society views it as we're not supposed to be here. We're not supposed to make it here. We were either supposed to kill each other in the streets or have a child or not be smart enough. I wasn't supposed to make it to this point, to a university campus, so me being here, I feel like I had to adjust and play both sides of the field. You know, when I was around more people I would have to put on ah "yo man, yeah, fo sho, man, yeah dog" you know, speak the slang, because if I didn't, they be like "what are you trying to be white, you trying to be white, why, why are you talking like that" and then if I was around black people I'd have to speak more proper, had to speak properly or they'd be like, "why are you talking slang," like, you know, either way it went you know, I would have to, I guess put on a mask, put on a mask and I couldn't for a while, I couldn't be just me, I couldn't just be who DREW is.

**NADIRA:** There is this story...

**LIEN:** Maybe, and this might be the most hurtful, I was with my first roommate and we were just sitting around, listening to music and talking and eating our favorite nachos and I think we were painting our toenails are something. **And we had been roommates for almost the whole of freshman year and we were planning on living together sophomore year.**

**FLORA:** We were going to a Halloween party, and I was getting ready to go and these girls were walking out of the dorm and they were dressed as like, well just as Latina whores, with big fake boobs and gigantic fake eyelashes, and like this like total cartoon offensive cartoon of Latinas...

**LIEN:** And then she comes over to sit on my bed and she puts her fingers up to her eyes like this (demonstrates) and pulls them back slanted and she says something like, "I just want to know if it makes you see different...having such narrow eyes like yours." I was so hurt, so hurt because I thought she and I....(she chokes up a bit). And I just feel like, what am I supposed to say to that?

**NADIRA:** There is a story....

**KAYLA:** I tried to explain to this guy why it was kind of offensive for him to dress as a Native American for Halloween, 'Cause he was just wearing brown tights, just brown tights, and something that was supposed to be like a feather headdress, but it was made out of ,like, foam feathers ya'know.

**FLORA:** They were like speaking in fake Spanish accents, and wearing long black wigs, and it was just really really offensive...distasteful. Yuck!

**KAYLA:** And I was like, and it—you know, it's just, like, some rich white kid that just, like, didn't want to wear a shirt at a party. Like a joke. And it's worse if you're a white person and you're doing it because then you're making a joke out of the hierarchy that *you're* at the top of. And it's kind of like spitting in someone's face.

**FLORA:** Like what would they do if I dressed up like a white whore and went parading in front of them and speaking in their like whiny West Michigan UP white accents? Upsetting right?

**NADIRA:** There is a story....

**LIEN:** How can I explain this? It is an alternating existence, like living in two parallel universes where you think you are one thing and you are accepted and what not and then all of a sudden you get an inkling of how other people perceive you...like yeah. You are not who you are. And these wounds, I carry them around with me quietly, I don't say anything. Now I would, but I had to go through more...I had to learn more. Probably it was being in my major that helped me the most because we read things and discussed things. Like this book by Frank Wu, this book YELLOW about Asian Americans and just about race in general. And there's this one part that I always remember, I memorized this quote from the book because it always helps me, like a mantra for helping me. (She looks up the passage in her journal or book.)

**FLORA:** This whole thing.. and I don't know, it stuck with with me and I just, changed. That changed me. I wanted to show people that Latinas, we are noble, we are smart, we are beautiful and fierce. Soy una mujer poderosa. And so after that, I started to be part of a Latino heritage group and to celebrate who I was more, and to love who I am, all parts of it.

**LIEN:** "I remain not only a stranger in a familiar land, but also a sojourner through my own life...I alternate between being conspicuous and vanishing, being stared at or looked through. Although the conditions may seem contradictory, they have in common the loss of control. I am who others perceive me to be rather than how I perceive myself to be."

**FLORA:** There was a part of me, when I first came here, that maybe I wanted to be white, I don't know, I just didn't want to sound or look different from my friends here, and so, I guess you know, I guess I just de-emphasized that part of me and acted more white. I wanted a white boyfriend, and white clothes.

**NADIRA:** There is a story...

**BRANDON:** My granny-ma told me to just always be who you are. "BRANDON, you don't let nobody..anybody tell you to be who you ain't...aren't" She always corrected her own grammar. Because I am bi-racial (as so many people are in America) there's this thing called the bifurcated self where we supposedly have this identity loss or crisis. My granny ma was a maid for a Jewish family in Detroit for years and years and she played in two worlds and I think she just didn't want me to have to live in that kind of reality where you might lose track of yourself.

**FLORA:** My parents taught me to be very proud of who I am, as a Latino woman, that we should celebrate...or uh you know be just, you know, uh, tell people about our heritage, cook our food for our friends, speak Espanol, know our history, to tell our story, you know, about how my grandparents came across the border and hid and then started a business selling plants and flowers, and made it, and now they have six nurseries and greenhouses. And I do. Now I love their story. "Estoy orgulloso de quien soy." As my mother would always tell me.

**NADIRA:** There is a story....from the Qran...There are frogs, two frogs in the desert and they are with a mob of frogs but the two fall into deep pit and the other frogs are looking down on them and the two frogs are jumping and jumping and finally one of them just lays down in the pit and dies. The other frog, he keeps jumping and jumping, looking up at all the other frogs who are jumping up and down at the top of the pit and so he keeps jumping until he finally jumps out of pit. And the other frogs say to him, they say basically, "why you jump and jump? We kept telling you to stop, to give up, that it would never happen." And the one frog he says, "I am deaf, and so I could not hear your cries, I just saw you jumping up and down at the top of the pit and I thought you were trying to help me, to cheer me on." This story, it is so simple and has such powerful lesson, that **discouraging words can trap someone in a pit. And sometimes, to make it out, we must be deaf to the intent of these words. We must encourage ourselves.**

**Moment VI: Let's get real.**

*This section begins as an actor enters with a placard reading "Promotional Photoshoot." He walks the perimeter of the space. We hear the sound of shutters as the cast reenacts a series of promotional images for the university.*

**VANESSA:** Can we go back to privilege for just a sec? I remember now something...yeah..and it's that racial cultural bias produces what I think are called micro-aggressions. You heard of these? This is what privilege is all about. Check it. It's like this. So, **it's like** I get up in the morning and brush my teeth and whatever and some white chick in the bathroom elbows me and doesn't say excuse me or sorry. Is that because I'm black or is that just because she's a bitch in the morning? Micro-aggression number one.

**FEMI:** At times I feel that my supervisor, um...communicates differently with me. I think I'm the second or third black that works there or worked there. Multiple times when I go to work, I'm sitting where I need to be, you know, where I need to be and doing my work. And multiple times I've seen other students, white students, working on their assignments.

**CAMERON:** I remember when I first started working for the cafes (at Western) as a delivery truck driver. **I was the only black driver.** I was the new guy so I expected people to be watching me and making sure I was doing the job right. I noticed that when some of the guys went on runs they would come back and check all of their stuff to make sure it was still there. We would bring iPad, iPod, laptops, and our phones to work because after our scheduled runs we had down time to study or whatever. I didn't want to jump to any conclusions so I sat back and watched.

**VANESSA:** Then, I am at the caf and the lady behind the counter or the student or whoever, just kinda shoves my food at me. **Is it because she's in pain from her bad back** or is it because I'm black? Micro-aggression number two.

**FEMI:** I'm not sure if they ignore the fact that they're working, or if it's just that the supervisor doesn't address them about not doing their job...but they spend literally half or the whole time doing homework while I'm you know, taking care of what needs to be done. And a couple of times, my supervisor addressed me about me doing my homework, and she just doesn't say anything to the other students. You know?

**CAMERON:** Every time one of the drivers left the room they would come back and peek into their backpacks to make sure no one had stolen their items. I didn't want to believe the reason they kept checking their bags was because of my color. **I figured because they didn't know me that well yet that they would have checked their items no matter what color I was. There is still a part of me that questions if my color had anything to do with this situation.** I really hope not. This situation still makes me feel uncomfortable and bothers me **to this day.**

**FEMI:** All I know is, the vibe, the voice, the manner, the look that I have received from my supervisor kind of makes me feel like I am being treated differently because I'm black. But, I can't really say that's what it is for sure, because I hate to say that's what it is, because that's not right, you know? Not at a university that has a diverse group of students and people. I dunno. That's how I feel.

**VANESSA:** So, then I am walking across campus with a coupla my girlfriends, and some white boys turn around and look at our asses as we pass and they say something like, "those brown ones sure do have some junk in the trunk." Micro-aggression number three.

**FLORA:** I don't go...at least anymore...I don't go to parties anymore at the white frats..I used to go cause that was the uh...you know...it was the hot thing to do when we were freshmen.

**CAMERON:** Then I was at this party with my buddy, who is a white guy, tall white guy, having a good time, and we like stepped outside to get some air or whatever and there was like a group of black you know African American people, male and female. they had tried to enter into the party, and the guyyyyy locked the door and told them that they couldn't get in or whatever.

**FLORA:** So, when I first came here we went and I don't remember which frat it was, but it was a white frat and we went...WMU is pretty famous for its parties so this is the way you meet friends. The frats are pretty segregated except for parties, then they are more...uh...integrated. Me and my suite mates, on a Friday night of first semester, we went to this party and you know, people were just really drunk, and it was a real scene.

**CAMERON:** So then um the group of African Americans got like you know a little rowdy got a little mad, threw something at the window or whatever, but it wasn't enough to like break the window or whatever, but they were definitely unhappy.

**FLORA:** And we finally left, and when we were walking out, there was this line of white guys just leaning on the cars and one or two of them said to me..."hey chica....you here to get pregnant...you gonna have a Mexican baby with us and drop outta school?" And you know, they were talking...saying this to me.

**CAMERON:** You know... I was in the party and a couple other couple other black people were in there, but it seemed like as soon as they saw the group of black African Americans tryin to get into the party they were like OH NO lock the door. And then one of the group was like 'oh they're only letting you in cuz you're light skinned cuz you don't look black.'

**FLORA:** And my friends, they were white, they said to me, "they're just drunk...ignore them." And I had just stopped because I was so shocked, I had never been treated...talked to that way. And they said something again, like, "you here to get fucked chica?" And I just stared, I don't know why I didn't get like mean or something, but I just said, "Déjeme sola." I should have said "Déjame en paz!"

**CAMERON:** I will never forget that. Them lookin at me and telling me 'you don't look black you're too light-skinned' so I was like do I go back into the party? Cuz they just locked out those black people, but like fuck you guys (referring to the group of black people), it was like a double edged sword.

**VANESSA:** And I go to class and my professor is talking about something with diversity and I'm the only black person in the class and so she looks at me all the time. Micro-aggression number four.

*Actors will act out the interactions with police as these stories are told.*

**TIERRA:** It was St.Patricks Day. I was staying over my boyfriend's house for the weekend. He lived in a house with 4 other people; all African American males. **It is tradition that the black community on campus get together on St. Patricks Day to celebrate the holiday.** The house was located in a residential neighborhood where many other parties would also take place. People were on the grill and music was playing. I stayed in my boyfriends room most of the time and so did he. Neither of us are party people. My best friend joined us and we sat in the room for a while just enjoying one another's company. We would leave the room occasionally to check on things but we stayed in the room for most of the party.

**BRANDON-** There's been a couple times, driving with my black friends, when I've gotten pulled over by campus police.

**TIERRA:** I decided to go to sleep. I was laying down when I heard commotion in the house. I went out to the hall to see what was going on and two cops were yelling at everyone telling them to get out of the house. (Cops adlib these yells as they act out this scene.) They turned to me and yelled for me to get out of the house. I didn't have any way to leave the house and I didn't have on shoes or a coat. I was about to go to sleep. **With no hesitation, I said that I lived at the house.**

**SEAN:** I was on Woodward and North Street, which is kind of this imaginary dividing line that um, kind of separates uh the white population from the black population. I was literally about three and a half blocks from my house and up ahead there were about 15 or 20 kids in the street. Two of the guys were on the side and they were actually down on the ground beating each other up. But as I got closer, they stopped fighting and all the attention turned to me and it got quiet.

**BRANDON-**This is just one story, but the guy didn't like the smell of my car. Said it smelled like something herbal.

**COP:** "Young man there is the smell of something herbal in your vehicle."

**BRANDON:** Yeah, I told him, I am drinking green tea with dandelion roots. Nobody believes me when I tell them I drink this stuff.

**TIERRA:** Both cops grabbed me and threw me against the living room wall. They cuffed me and didn't tell me why I was being arrested. While they were detaining me, my boyfriend, now husband, was explaining, "She's my girlfriend. I live here. Take me instead." They didn't care or try to hear anything that he was saying. So at that point, they knew that they had no reason to detain me.

**SEAN:** This is my memory which is a little shaky um cause it all happened very quickly um as I started to walk down the street this line happened.

**BRANDON-**It's like they look at me being a vegan and can't fit that into their heads...black man plus vegan somehow equals bullshit . Well, he just kept saying,

**COP:** "Something smells herbal. Something smells herbal."

**BRANDON:** And he's sniffing around, like literally sniffing. **And I even hold my tea up for him.** Herbal my ass. He wanted to search my whole car and take me in cause I was weaving on the road and driving "slow." What? You do the math.

**TIERRA:** They put me in the police car without my shoes, coat or ID. The cops had to make another stop because someone had ran their car over the railroad tracks. I was freezing and the cops left their doors open while they attended to their other call which took about 45 minutes. They put on their coats and had no consideration for me.

*The actors perform a stylized version of SEAN'S beating.*

**SEAN:** The first guy who I had just passed hit me. at some point after being kind of tossed around um I ended up on the ground covering my head to avoid any face or neck trauma, and ah I remember getting kicked whatever in the back and they broke my back actually...

**TIERRA:** At the jail, they frisked me, took mug shots, and kept me in a cell for over an hour even and didn't let me use the restroom and I had an emergency. They never told me why I was being arrested. Even after the cop and I had an opportunity to discuss the situation, I was still charged with "Excessive Noise". I had to go to court and plead not guilty for a noise violation which obviously got dismissed.

**SEAN:** And what they knew a lot better than I did was that police don't really respond to what they think is black on black violence. even though the police station was about four minutes away it took them 35 minutes to get to me. (pause) I remember they got out of their cars and one said of them said to the other 'oh my god, he's white.' that's a moment that is seared into my memory. I remember the fear on the cops face almost as if somehow because I was white it suddenly mattered that they had messed up.



**TIERRA:** I've never been to a party on campus that got shut down the way that party did. When I go to parties hosted by the black community, they ALWAYS get shut down, almost immediately. When I've been to WMU party's that weren't black parties, they lasted longer even though there was no difference in volume. When those parties DO get shut down, the police is never as aggressive as I've witnessed at black parties. It's a very interesting thing to witness but it's another thing to experience the injustice upfront.

**VANESSA:** Another class, I am called on to answer a question for "how would black people respond to such and such?" Micro-aggression number **four**.

**SEAN:** After that happened uh there was some reverberation even though a lot of my friends and colleagues were really supportive in terms of making sure I was fed and I was okay, there is a kind of uh 'well if he wouldn't put himself in dangerous situations, then this wouldn't have happened to him.' Uh as if the fact that I walked at 6pm three blocks from my house was like dangerous behavior. so it was sympathy but also a kind of that's what you get if you don't play by the rules kind of feeling. and a lot of people remarked on that as well 'if I was you I'd be a lot more angry.'

**VANESSA:** Six is me getting in the elevator to go down (and I've got really nice hair...lotsa people say so) and a white girl just touches it. Doesn't ask me. Just touches it. Micro-aggression number **five**.

**SEAN:** I also noticed that people in talking to me about it I think they were thinking of me as someone who taught African American literature and I think a lot of people were wondering, 'so do you still like black people?' (laughs) That was maybe the question I was projecting onto them um but I think there was curiosity like did this shake your faith in relationships between the races. **I just felt I was in a weird situation** because I do teach the literature of minorities, having that experience, I felt that I was kind of on display and that I wasn't giving people what they wanted to see.

**BRANDON-** I was in a class on social justice and racial inequality kinds of stuff. There's the exercise, that you do and it's this walk you do in a big room where all the people line themselves up on the back wall and then this list of stuff is read out one at a time. Stuff like, "if you can go to the mall or into a store and not be concerned that you will be watched and followed, take a step forward." There's a whole bunch of these. The white people typically get further and farther ahead of the people of color in the room, give or take.

**TIERRA:** These are memories in my life that will never go away. I do not trust the police. Not just because of what I see in the news but because of my own experiences. Police brutality is REAL. Something needs to be done about this. When I see police I am ALWAYS scared first. Because if your skin is brown, it may be your turn to experience the injustice.

**BRANDON-** But on this particular evening, the lady leading the workshop began as usual and then about like maybe seven or eight statements in, four or five white students, most of them guys just say, "This is bullshit. This doesn't exist. Why don't we talk about the welfare state." And on and on. And she [the leader] finally just gathered up all her stuff and left. She left and she was in tears. That happened here, on this campus. Don't tell me everything's ok.

**BRANDON-** Question is, how do you get guys like those five to care? Why should they? For them, everything's A-OK because here's what's going to happen to them....they're going to get their business degrees and get a job someplace and buy a house in the white part of town and never ever have to deal with this on any significant level. And if they do have to deal...it will be tolerance.

**VANESSA:** You wanna hear more? By the time I get done with my day there might be a dozen, there might be twenty, and there might be a hundred. What does this do to me? Makes me feel like shit...I can tell you that.

**TIERRA:** I hope it gets better. I really need it to get better.

## **Moment VII -- Waking up and creating a culture of resistance.**

**SEAN:** We always think we know more about race than we do. There's a quotation by Gayatri Spivak... "You have to unlearn your privilege as your loss." Meaning--it's almost anti-logical, right, like unlearning. "Unlearn your privilege as your loss," I think when I first heard it, it just sounded like words, like 'ketchup, ketchup, ketchup' or something, but the more I thought about it, the more – if you can do that, that's kind of one of the greatest things you can do as a human being is to unlearn your privilege- is to take it apart and say, 'wow, that wasn't a stepping stone it was a wall.'

**ANNIE:** Um, like I think that at this point, um, privilege isn't necessarily anybody's fault anymore. It's just that we're all the result of a very long and twisted system and we need to wake up and be aware and not let it control us anymore. You know?

**COLE:** I mean it starts with trying to create opportunities for people to experience the "other," right? So from my point of view heavily recruiting a wide diverse range of students is job one, right, so that people can have experiences with people that are different from them in classes.

**ISAIAH:** There's this quote... it's an Eli Wiesel quote, "We must not see any person as an abstraction. Instead we must see in every person a universe with its own secrets, with its own treasures, with its own anguish, and with **some** measure of triumph." Really that's sort of what we all need to aspire to.

**LIEN:** We're so afraid of actually getting to know an individual cause maybe then we'll have to open up ourselves. And it would make life a lot more colorful. It would make life a lot more vibrant. But it would make life a lot more vulnerable.

**FLORA:** If we all get together and do this....if we all come together and like Latinas and blacks and whites and Asian people just are doing stuff together, then we are making the world a better place just by being this way. Be the change? Who said that? Ghandi or at least it's a saying that my mom has over her desk and I think it is attributed to him, "be the change you want to see in the world."

**NATALIE:** Do more! That's it. Action, and then the RIGHT action.

**VANESSA:** Openness is not easy and in this group that I'm in, well, we just allow for racial blunders to occur and we are real honest and open about that.

**DINAH:** I would like there to be more mandatory classes, regardless of your college or major, one AT LEAST mandatory class in something like multiculturalism and you know fifteen weeks out of four years ain't gonna stick, and it ain't much, but it's SOMETHING. It at least lights a spark and in my experience, even teaching gen-ed classes to bored people, you get one or two who actually learn something and that pays it forward.

**VANESSA:** Cause see...cause see...then, and only then will equality happen when that level of respect is developed in that space and then, it is much less likely that we will hurt one another. That is my hope.

**FLORA:** Yes there is hope, because look at me...I came here not knowing about this kinda stuff, you know, not knowing what privilege is, and how to work through this system, and I figured it out. [I'm graduating and I'm going to be a teacher with the Teach for America program, and I am going to do my part to help kids like me.](#)

**BRANDON:** My daddy told me a lot of stories about civil rights. I'm thirty now, he had me when he was 45, so before I was born, he remembers marching and being a part of something much bigger than himself. [See, I think this is privilege too...having this sense of meaning and hope, that there is a reason for all of this. What is that? How do we get that?](#)

**JOSH:** The only way to break [the](#) pattern is to tear down the whole system and build it back up again or to put mechanisms which would check white people's racism...so like affirmative action and things like that.

**BRANDON:** My dad, he marched on Washington and was part of the riots in Detroit and he always had that to hold on to....and he told me those stories as a part of my own history.

**FLORA:** You know, Caesar Chavez, *¡Sí se puede!*? It can be done. He said this, wait I have to look it up (she looks it up on her phone)...

**BRANDON:** See, I just don't exist on my own without a history of this resistance. When my daddy marched, I was there with him, my very DNA and the structure of my soul. And I want to march too. I mean, I do. You can participate if you choose, there are things to get involved in, but most choose to glide down the long path of apathy, and what is the cost of that?

**FLORA:** OK, this is the one... "History will judge societies and governments — and their institutions — not by how big they are or how well they serve the rich and the powerful, but by how effectively they respond to the needs of the poor and the helpless."

**JOSH:** And I think of what I do, what I teach, as a check your privilege initiative. I tell this to my students all the time, that you should check it, check it.

**BRANDON:** We can do something about it. We can fight and be intentional about ending racism and inequalities on a day to day basis.

**FLORA:** And this is true...so true. How will we be judged if we look at ourselves the way things are right now? Not so good right? But we can change that.

**JOSH:** If you care about equality and a better world to live in, you should check it, and check it again. Check your privilege.

**BRANDON:** My dad, he died last year. And I saw him just a few days before he died, and I thanked him for setting that example and for showing me the way and he couldn't talk much, but he did say, "March on Brandon. March on!"