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Title: N*W*C and its Implications on Campus Climate
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Abstract: The play N*W*C attempts to discredit the use of stereotypes and racially sensitive words. Given the current context of a large Midwestern university, this study seeks to document the reactions of multiple stake holding groups to the N*W*C play and understand its implications on campus climate. Stake holding groups include: a university administrator; faculty members from different academic departments; and university students that had seen the play. Responses to the play were studied using an ethnographic research design. Data was gathered using the following qualitative methods: (a) document analysis, (b) field notes, and (c) interviews. Data was analyzed using techniques associated with naturalistic interpretation and triangulation (Denzin, 1989). While everyone agreed that N*W*C had its drawbacks, those who reacted positively to the play (the majority of respondents) believed N*W*C to be a step in the right direction in helping to fight prejudice, bias, discrimination, and injustice.

Initial Exercises: There were three initial exercises. The first exercise is located in the discussion forum "Discussion Forum for First Assignment." The second exercise is located in the discussion forum "Second Assignment-Discussion Forum for NWC Video." The third exercise is located in the discussion forum "NWC Ethnographies."

Question: 1) How do audience members respond to N*W*C?

2) What were audience members laughing at? How intense was the laughter?

3) What were this show's implications on campus climate? Did N*W*C perpetuate the use of negative racial stereotypes?

4) What medium works best for discussing issues pertaining to race and racism?

Plan: Methodology:

Participants: There were a total of eight participants in this study, which included a
university administrator, faculty members from different academic departments, and university students that had seen the play.

**Methods:**

The responses to the play were studied using an ethnographic research design. Data was collected using the following qualitative methods: (a) document analysis, (b) field notes, and (c) interviews. Data was analyzed using techniques associated with naturalistic interpretation (Denzin, 1989).

**Procedure:**

(A) In an open letter to a university administrator, Professor Sundiata Cha-Jua, a faculty member in the African American Studies Department, claimed to speak on behalf of his whole department when expressing his feelings about N"W*C. Because Professor Cha-Jua had claimed to speak on behalf of his whole department, this letter was analyzed to obtain information regarding the African American Studies Department’s overall feelings regarding N"W*C.

(B) In gathering field notes, I attended the September 20th performance of N"W*C, the post-show discussion involving the actors and audience members, and the September 21st interview that a graduate student in philosophy held with the actors. Detailed descriptions were taken of how audience members reacted to certain scenes, jokes, and statements, as well as detailing the extent of their reactions. In the post-show discussion and the September 21st interview, detailed descriptions were
taken as to the questions being asked to the actors, as well as their responses to those questions. Also reported in the field notes were characteristics of audience members (i.e. clothing and physical appearance) and a description of the setting in which the field notes were taken.

(C) Interviews involved only those students who had attended the play on any of its three performances. Three routes were taken in gathering interview participants. First, my colleagues and I had bulletins made and sent to students living in one of the university’s undergraduate dormitories. We chose this specific dormitory because we discovered that many of the undergraduate students that had seen the play live there. Moreover, this dormitory hosted many of the post-show dialogues, and we, consequently, believed that they would be more willing to help us spread the word of our research and, in doing so, help us find students who had seen the play. Our second method of obtaining interview participants involved the social networking website Facebook. Facebook includes many applications and options, such as messaging other students, watching music videos, and creating groups for common interests. We created a group focusing on the N*W*C play and invited fellow students to join. We specifically asked students to join if they had actually seen the play. Out of the four hundred students invited, only twenty-two students joined. After finding out who had seen the play, we then sent out a detailed mass e-mail describing our study and asked if
anyone would be interested in participating. The third route in gathering interviews involved going to a student senate meeting on multicultural affairs and asking student senators and their staffers if they would be interested in participating in our study (we learned that some had seen the play and were interested in conducting interviews).

Data:

(A) Document Analysis:
Available upon request.

(B) Field Notes:
I arrived at the Krannert Center at 7:10 (for the 7:30 showing of N*W*C). As I entered the complex, the lights were dim, and I remember seeing perhaps ten to twenty individuals dressed in somewhat casual attire. Some men wore blazers while others wore just regular dress shirts of various colors. Women wore cocktail dresses with high heels. They were gathered around the “Interlude” area watching two men playing music on their keyboards. After turning the corner, towards the west end of the building, I then headed to the Krannert Center’s Colwell Playhouse where I sat myself, with my notebook placed upon my lap, and awaited the start of the production. When I entered, I took notice of how majestic the Colwell Playhouse appeared. It was of magnificent size. The architecture resembled that of a stadium. All the chairs were covered in a red cushion, and each row seemed to stretch from one side of the hall to the other. The stage was set and ready for the start of the production. The set consisted of a handful of huge wall-like structures. The front three wall-like structures had the letters “N,” “W,” and “C” inscribed on them (each letter represented each racial slur). Hip-hop music was playing in the background (I guess in order to help time pass). My seat was located in a great position that would enable me to easily observe most of the audience during the show. I was placed about four to five rows from the back. Once I sat down, there were few people in the hall.
with me. However, with each passing minute, more and more people began to flow into the auditorium, and after about ten to fifteen minutes, the auditorium was filled at almost full capacity. Overall, there was a diverse group of audience members. It was hard to say, exactly, but if I had to make an estimate, I would say that the audience was made up mostly of Caucasians, but if they were the majority, it was not by much. Again, the audience was quite diverse with, besides Caucasians, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans (including Indian Americans). While I waiting for the show to begin, a lady around my age came to sit next to me. I had never met her before, but she did not hesitate to begin a conversation with me. Like me, she is a senior. She was a Caucasian woman with brown hair and a slender body shape. I estimated her to be no more than five and one half feet. She wore a pink sleeveless top and black dress pants. We engaged one another in small talk, and after a few moments, she asked me why I had a notebook with me. I, of course, did not want to tell her I was conducting observational research, so I told her, simply, that I was taking notes in order to help myself later write a summary of the production. I asked her as to why she came to see the show, and she responded, “I just came here for kicks...no reason in particular. I like stuff that pertains to racial issues, and I thought why not?” She told me that she had heard negative critiques of the production in that people reported being offended. After saying such, she did go out of her way to tell me that “[she] is not easily offended” and “didn’t quite see what all the fuss was about.” Not long after her and I began conversing, the lights began to dim, and the show finally started. I should make note of the fact that, due to the lack of light in the auditorium, it became and remained extremely difficult for me to be certain as to who was laughing at specific jokes. I am making my best guesses when gathering these notes. The actors began the show by chanting each racial slur over and over again (in a song-like fashion). Many of the audience members laughed at Raphael and Alan when chanting their slurs, but when Miles entered the stage chanting the N-word repeatedly, everyone broke out into laughter. The production had proceeded just as it did during the screening. There were no new routines or anything of that sort. Thus, the play proceeded just as expected. How the audience reacted to the opening scene, where the actors were chanting racial slurs, was no different from the rest of the show. With each racial stereotype mentioned, the audience erupted in laughter. Interestingly enough, when Miles used African American stereotypes, the audience members laughed more intensely than they did at the Latino or Asian stereotypes used by Raphael and Alan, respectively. This led me to believe that the public, in general, may be more disposed to finding humor in African American stereotypes. Audience members laughed harder when, for instance, Miles imitated stereotypical African American dialect. Perhaps the audience believed
that the African American stereotypes are more “factual” or true than the Latino and Asian stereotypes. I say that because, in front of me, were about five Caucasian individuals who seemed to not get enough of the African American jokes. In fact, when leaning over to write my notes (I had to lean over to get some light) I overheard one Caucasian male saying to another Caucasian male, “That’s so true!” The other Caucasian male responded with, “That’s why it’s funny bro.” Since they were sitting below me, with their backs facing me, it was hard to get a detailed description of either of them. All I can say is that the first speaker (in the description I just described) was wearing a Notre Dame Fighting Irish baseball cap. The other Caucasian male did not wear a hat or anything that would give someone a reason to distinguish him from a crowd; he wore a blue t-shirt. Also, he had short brown hair. Now the stereotypes that audience members found humorous had a wide range. They included references to education, immigration, the size of one’s genitalia, accents, vernacular, and body movements. However, I should note that audience members did laugh when the actors made fun of Caucasian stereotypes. Specifically, many Caucasians laughed at jokes regarding “white” vernacular. It was important for me to find out as to why and how people were laughing. In a sense, one may be able to get an understanding of how people perceive certain things by the way(s) they react to it. For example, with some of the jokes (centered on stereotypes), the audience reacted in a way that gave me the impression that they knew just how ridiculous the stereotypes were. Specifically, instead of laughing, “Ha-ha...that’s hilarious and true,” they laughed, “Ha-ha...wow...that’s ridiculous.” One would then obviously question that if it was so ridiculous, how was it able to attract laughter? That would be a good question, and one definitely worth asking. I started to wonder, then, if it was all in the delivery. Perhaps it was the funny movements, sounds, and brilliantly executed timing of the actors that made an unfunny subject matter funny. During each actor’s story, the audience was dead silent. There were times when one could, literally, hear a pin drop. After each story was told, the audience erupted in applause. I began to wonder if the audience was, for the most part, “getting it.” When I say terms like “getting it” or “got it” I mean that audience members understood the underlying message(s) that the actors were trying to convey with their performance(s) or act(s). Overall, every act which emphasized the theme of unity and/or self-love received a thunderous applause. It was true that people of all backgrounds, in attendance, were laughing at stereotypes; that is undeniable. However, these same people were also attentive to the messages underlying each act. Midway through the show, I noticed about maybe five to ten individuals leaving the auditorium; they never came back. This reinforced the notion that even though it seemed as if most of the people in attendance “got it,” others still did not (or were completely offended
that they had to leave). I was unable to make detailed descriptions about the individuals who left because they were opposite of where I was sitting. I did notice, though, that they were all African Americans; of the individuals who left, there were more women than men. The skit involving the use and discussion of “race cards” did not draw immense laughter. When first presented, audience members did laugh but not with much enthusiasm. By the end of the skit, I noticed that it, overall, did not attract much laughter. This leads me to speculate that many people did not find the “race card” skit humorous and perhaps were even offended by it. When the actors began their skit involving iconic American/white figures (Santa Claus, Superman, Jesus, etc.), much of the audience found it funny and many applauded to show, what I believed to be, appreciation for tackling an issue that does not seem to garner much attention within the mainstream discussion(s) regarding race and racism. When the show came to close (and the auditorium faded to black), it ended with a standing ovation. If anyone was offended (who happened to stay for the whole production), they were not to the extent that they were unable to enjoy the show. The standing ovation lasted for approximately ten to twenty seconds.

After the standing ovation had ended, the lights to the auditorium came back on, and people began to leave. Some people left without hesitation, some people stayed after for a few moments to talk with other audience members, and others, like myself, stayed after to hear the post-show discussion. I moved from where I was sitting (approximately four to five rows from the back of the auditorium) to approximately two or three rows from the front of the stage. Once arriving at my new seat, I began to stretch and look around to see who exactly had stayed to hear the discussion with the actors. The audience makeup remained quite diverse. There were many white, black, Latino, and Asian (including Indian) audience members still remaining in attendance. I was sort of surprised by this because I assumed there would be a limited number of white students. I based that assumption on another assumption that many white students on this campus don’t consider there to be many serious or troubling racial issues. Thus, I didn’t expect there to be many white students remaining in the auditorium to hear a discussion focusing on race and stereotypes. After about five or ten minutes, the three actors (Miles, Raphael, and Alan) arrived back on stage to converse with audience members. They were dressed in casual/relaxed attire. Miles and Raphael both wore blue jeans with black t-shirts; the t-shirts were not identical. Both shirts had different writings on them, but they were too small to make out; the writings on both t-shirts used white letters. Alan had a more “laid back” attire. He wore dark-colored jeans with a grey tank top. The discussion was moderated by Lisa Dixon (Associate Professor, Department of Theatre). The
discussion was essentially a “Q & A” session between the actors and the audience. The trio began by stating how they met one another in community college while on the debate team. Soon afterwards, an African American woman began the “Q & A” session by asking why the actors to wear all white at the end of the show. The actors responded that they decided to use white because the color white lit better under the stage lights. They went on to say that white was used because it is a neutral color. It was meant to represent a blank page, and it was also used to show a unity among the actors. The actors explained how they wanted to combine their abilities/powers in order to combat racist ideologies. Raphael wanted to tell the story of his parents (believing them to be unsung heroes); Miles incorporated his comedic skills; and Alan used the talents he acquired from slam poetry. When asked by another African American woman about whether they thought that they were perpetuating stereotypes, the actors responded by saying that they incorporated the use of stereotypes because they, first, wanted to bring them up. Then they wanted to twist them and, finally, turn them “on their heads.” Alan then went on to say that as the production went on, stereotypes are further and continuously broken down. After this response from the actors, a Caucasian male stated that it had, in fact, worked for him. A Caucasian woman asked as to how she could begin a dialogue about matters pertaining to race and racism. Her concern was that her means of doing such would be limited because she was a “white person.” The actors answered her by saying that she should start such a dialogue with “sensitivity and patience.” After hearing concerns about whether people would walk away from this show with the actors’ intended message, the actors responded by saying that their show is intended to serve as a means to “start the dialogue” on matters regarding race and ethnicity. They wanted to make clear that their play wasn’t the “end all, be all” on any such dialogue. An African American woman asked the actors to list a few of the positive reasons for being African American; she believed that the actors only stated negative African American stereotypes as reasons for wanting to be black. The actors responded by saying that they, in fact, did state positive reasons for wanting to be black. Positive reasons included being “soulful” and “beautiful.” This answer was not apparently good enough for the woman, and she stated to Miles, “You still haven’t answered my question.” Miles responded by saying, “Yes I did. I said many positive things such as African Americans being ‘soulful’ and ‘beautiful.’” The actors ended up repeating themselves when attempting to answer this woman’s question. Raphael wanted the audience to also take away with them the message of coalition politics. Raphael stated that he also wanted the audience to understand that the struggle for civil rights is an ongoing process and should be fought constantly. When questioned about whether comedy was the best medium for attacking racism, Raphael answered that
“comedy’s the best way to tackle issues that are taboo.” One theme that the actors absolutely wanted to make clear was that even though they came from different backgrounds, they had similar stories. They shared stories of prejudice and uncertain identities. In the end, they wanted to get across the idea that they had more in common than one would think. Towards the end of the discussion, a University of Illinois professor asked a question regarding the perpetuation of racism. He was an African American male, somewhere in his late thirties or forties, and wore a light brown dress shirt with dark brown or black dress pants. He appeared to be somewhat angry when asking his question. He ended up going on a rant about white students wearing Chief t-shirts and being apathetic to or completely unaware of racism on campus. The actors expressed their concern and shared in his frustration, but when responding to his accusation of them perpetuating stereotypes, they said that their play isn’t “designed to do that” and that their production only seeks to be that starting point for discussing racial discourse. I should make a note here. When writing the field notes for this discussion, I chose not to write down what each audience member (who asked a question) was wearing or what some of their physical characteristics were (i.e. hair color, eye color, etc.). I wasn’t too concerned about the color of one’s hair, jeans, or t-shirt. That information is irrelevant to my research. Instead, I just wanted to make note of each individual’s demographic (i.e. Caucasian, African American, Asian, Latino/a).

On Friday, I had the privilege of sitting in on an interview that Eric Dickson, a graduate student in philosophy, was conducting with the actors of N*W*C. The event was advertised as not being open to the public but after getting in touch with him, and asking if I could attend the interview, he was nice enough to let me sit in on the interview and take notes. I entered the Krannert Center for the one o’clock interview. It was a very quiet and serene atmosphere. Once I entered the Krannert Center, I headed west towards the Colwell Playhouse foyer where I was supposed to meet with Mr. Dickson and the actors. After about ten minutes, I met with Mr. Dickson, and then we went into the auditorium. Once we met with and introduced ourselves to the actors, we then went into this room on the north side of the Colwell Playhouse. The actors were casually dressed wearing t-shirts and jeans. Raphael and Miles both wore blue jeans and black t-shirts. These two t-shirts differed only in their sayings. The sayings were made up of white letters, but I could not make them out. Alan wore light brown khaki shorts with a white tank top. He also wore a brown fedora. Inside this room was a long dark brown table in which we then sat down and began the interview; the table, itself, was perhaps close to twenty to twenty-five feet in length. Mr. Dickson began the interview by asking any of the actors to describe the process in which they construct a sketch. Each actor took turns answering
this question. Raphael began by saying that they begin with the different stories each actor has to tell. They start with stories, then they discuss each actor’s unique experiences, and finally, they discuss the words involved with each story and/or experience. Each sketch is constructed in a brain-storm type of atmosphere (one thing leads to the next). In constructing sketches, the three actors also focused on issues pertaining to one’s identity, traditional American/white icons (Santa Claus, Jesus, the Pope, etc.), and the love and embracement of other cultures. The actors wanted to make clear that the construction of sketches did not begin with poking fun at stereotypes; they argued that their sketches are not made for the purpose of expanding racial stereotypes. Furthermore, all three actors acknowledged that they are conscious of their use of racial stereotypes, as well as the criticism following such usage. They believe that incorporating stereotypes is a good thing because it gets people talking. Accordingly, they believe that their show will serve as a starting point for discussions pertaining to race and racism. The actors also go on to distinguish, what they call, “racial humor” from ‘racist humor.” They actors claim that their production falls within the sphere of racial humor. According to them, racial humor involves being aware of the social struggles facing minority groups while racist humor involves not being aware of the social struggles facing minority groups. Alan went on to say that he believes racism to be a social construction; he also didn’t understand and questioned as to how their production perpetuates stereotypes when their stories detail the struggles they faced because of racial stereotypes. Raphael went on to say that their show “works because all three of [the actors] are friends and have an understanding. Mr. Dickson then asked as to why there is no white actor in the show. Raphael answered that the “white force” is already there in the form of society’s structures and principles. Furthermore, none of the actors believed that white actors would have been able to pull off a show like theirs.’ Miles went on to jokingly ask, “Can you imagine what would happen if three white actors did a play called N*W*C?” Mr. Dickson laughed and responded by saying, “That would be awkward and somewhat painful to watch.” When asked if they believed their show was changing people’s minds for the better Miles responded, “I think more times than not” and then added, “it is really up to the individual to get it, not me.” He then put his head down and said, “We can try only so much.” Raphael added, “This show introduces nothing new to racist people. This show doesn’t create racists.” Miles then went on to state that everyone can be racists and they should “check themselves first” before the look and judge others. He then added to that by saying, “Most individuals are quick to point their fingers at white people.” The actors then begin explaining a sort of “trap door” concept they developed. They say that the audience is set up. First they structure the show, so that people laugh at the racial stereotypes. Then, the actors proceed to tell
their stories. This is done, say the actors, in order to create uncomfortable and unsettling feelings for the audience. These unsettling and uncomfortable feelings are what, supposedly, wake audience members up to the ridiculousness of racial stereotypes. Miles, himself, is not too worried about reinforcing racial stereotypes. “It’s okay if they don’t get it. Maybe it’ll take more than a show; besides, other forms of media reinforce [racial] stereotypes more than our show. At least we try to debunk stereotypes.” After Miles said this, Mr. Dickson shook his head up and down, took a look at his watch, and thanked the men for doing the interview. After that, we all got up, shook each other’s hands, and went on our own ways. Before leaving, I made sure to thank Mr. Dickson for letting me sit in on the interview. After seeing the screening of this show, I felt certain about my negative feelings towards it. However, after watching it live and sitting in on a discussion and an interview with the actors, I began to have mixed feelings. I do not believe this show is bad. Furthermore, I would not waste my time boycotting a show like this. While its methods are questionable, it does try to combat racist ideology. Moreover, I would rather spend my time and resources boycotting, for instance, a company that distributes harmful products that could prove lethal to consumers/buyers. It is true, however, that some audience members will get the message of unity and “oneness” that this show promotes while others will not. But if this show accomplishes nothing else, it will at least foster a dialogue on race and campus climate.

(C) Interviews:
University Administrator (U.A.) Interview

Background story:

-car pulls up alongside the university administrator...“Where can we find us a [numerous slurs].”

-group of six white men beat him up.

-when developing a thinking of his life’s work, he saw the importance of mixing both personal and professional aspects.

-N*W*C: “Most surprising experience I’ve had.”

-mentioned that show was supported by important African America
cultural figures (i.e. Malcolm X’s oldest daughter).

-he mentioned the challenge of understanding contrasting views regarding the play (ethnic cultural figures vs. minority students and faculty)

Thoughts about the play:
-feels more strongly about his decision to invite the play to campus.
-at first he was not interested in the play; the title turned him off from it; it was unattractive.
-he saw the project as meaning enough to some people; thus, he wanted to investigate it further.
-he admired and became compelled by the “authenticity” that drove the actors to do such a piece.
-he is drawn to autobiographical work.
-he was moved by the developing artists’ efforts; he saw them as using art to communicate something; the need to encourage people to delve into matters pertaining to race and racism.
-he was moved by their “courage” to tackle this challenge.
-he saw potential value in this play...considering the history (recent/not recent) of our campus.
-he spoke of his inspiration to let the show come here by referencing “heartbreaking” stories of past jazz musicians who were discriminated against.
-he became convinced the N°W°C could positively contribute to the
dialogue surrounding campus.

-he says that one should not look for “perfect pieces of art; he says one should look for art that is genuine, creative, and has the potential to contribute in a positive and/or meaningful way.

-You-Tube clips he said were outrageous and over-the-top.

-Sundiata Cha-Jua-clips from You-Tube are “biopsy” of the work.

-Ross was concerned and disappointed how the N*W*C show didn’t have as much of a constructive impact here as they had in other locales.

-he spoke about “expecting experiences.” Basically, this means that if you expect, the show to be bad, then, after seeing it, you will most likely see it as bad and vice versa.

Was this campus ready to handle this show?

-“Yes I do.” “We can have this without ‘race fights.’” “We’re better as a result of seeing the production.”

-he says we should not be afraid if we believe in an academic mindset.

-we should be able to discuss issues pertaining to race and racism without becoming uncivil.

-Cha-Jua: says the university administrator’s decision to invite the play here was an example of “white liberal ignorance.”

-U.A.: “We’re better than that! We can handle this.”

-U.A.: N*W*C is no magical solution to racial issues; it is one small piece of a massive effort to fight ideas of racism.

-U.A.: “We should be able to talk about [racial issues].
he says that if we focus so much on making the “perfect decision,” we will never get anywhere with anything.

it does hurt him to know that some people were upset and offended by the show.

people expressed appreciation for the administrator inviting N*W*C.

Witnessing three young men having the courage to take on race and create something meaningful.

Discussion Mediator: when the actors were asked about why only those three demographics were included in the production, the discussion mediator responded by saying that the show was only about these three guys.

U.A. goes on to say that not everything we do has to be complete and perfect...including this play.

this play is a particular piece created by three young men that speaks from their generation to their generation.

Would you bring them back?

Yes, but if they did come back, he would rather see them performing a different project. That’s not to say that he wouldn’t invite them back for N*W*C.

Response:

Cha-Jua: letter or denouncement.

they met to talk about the letter.

Cha-Jua asked if the school’s performing arts center would sponsor talk
events (responses to N\*W\*C).

-U.A. stated that it is important to not fail to collaborate when asked to collaborate if you can do it.

-he’s glad the collaborations took place.

-he says that it is important for young artists to be supported.

-young artists are learning and getting better/stronger with more experience.

**Faculty Member Interviews:**

**First Interview: (Robert Mejia)**

**Question 1:** What has your experience regarding race relationships been like on this campus?

She discussed the fact that many of the courses in the African American Studies Program are "gen-ed course requirements" and therefore she feels "quite a few students don't care about the courses" that end up taking them. Many of her students she feels are "reluctant and antagonistic about the courses." She finds "white students not understanding privilege and not understanding the advantages of privilege." Additionally she says they are "not interested in learning about it." She went on to talk about a white student who "last semester wrote a paper called Nigger" and that nothing was done to this student. There was another story she related of a racial attack against a student on facebook and once again the faculty did nothing. Many students came to class wearing chief t-shirts. She also said that she feels like the "black faculty need to prove that they know what they are talking about." She said this in regards to teaching to white students in class.

**Question 2:** What role has the African American Studies Program played in your experience here?
She started out by saying that this was the "first Campus she at where she was part of an African American studies program." Before that she taught in the sociology program and said it was "very different than sociology." In regards to the program she said "it feels like home" and that she is "comfortable talking about African American issues" in the program. She said that the "campus can be very isolating" and "without friends and family you can feel very isolated" and she feels the "African American program provides a community" to help with that.

Question 3: What would you want people to know about the African American Studies Program?

It is an "academic unit that provides services to the community. It discusses injustice and inequity." She went on to say it is "fighting not just for African Americans but all humanity for justice and civil rights." She explained humanity as "recognizing the significance that all groups have to offer. Difference is good but not the inequity between them."

Question 4: What were your initial thoughts and feelings about the play?

She first heard about it over the summer. The previous chair told her about it and "took a strong position." He wrote an initial letter that she helped revise. She said that "it is ok to disagree but to maintain relations on campus." In regards to the play she said she "couldn't respect it but that it was a teachable moment." She said what bothered her a lot was that "student affairs bought tickets and tried to give them away." She did say she was happy that "some faculty refused to give them away." Additionally she was upset that the Daily Illini ran stuff about the play and felt that both student affairs and the DI supported this play more than they had other things at the performing arts center in the past.

Here she starts talking more about her reactions to the play and what happened in response on campus:
She felt the need to "enlist other racialized units." She was disappointed that "all of the other units didn't come on board" and she couldn't "understand why they wouldn't oppose the NWC." She "didn't expect student affairs to purchase tickets" causing her to feel "surprised and troubled." She was "surprised that the show was worse than she thought." She was also concerned that the performers were "not open to critical questions." She said that "the show was not about disarming stereotypes" but "would have been a great show if it was about the coming of age." She was not surprised about the counter events that came about and was "overwhelmed with the turnout." She did say that the "events were for people who were already thinking about race."

First Interview: (John Phillips)

1. What has your experience regarding race relations been like on this campus?
The experience can be difficult for faculty of color. We have several large general education requirements. The students don’t see the course as necessary. The majority of [these students] are white students. These students are not interested. Faculty members have very negative experiences. For example, a student wrote a paper titled “Nigger.” Students evaluate African-American faculty lower. They are not seen as experts in their fields.

2. What role has this department played in your experience here?
This is the first campus where I have been in an [ethnic studies] unit. It feels like home. I can ask questions and have conversations without having to preface the legitimacy of the program. We have a sense of community on arrival. So this [department] is very important.

3. What would you want people to know about this department?
Next year we are an academic department. Our focus might be on an
[ethnic group], but this is really about humanity. Humanity as the importance of what all groups have to offer. Distinctions are good, problems are bad.

4. How did you first hear about the play?
Over the summer, the prior chair drafted the letter with my assistance. We developed a compromise over the content of the letter. It is important to build good relations [with the community].

5. What were your initial thoughts and feelings about it?
I didn’t think it was a moment of ill intent. But its problematic in its presentation. Many faculty members were upset at the pressure to publicize. The administration pressured us to encourage our students to attend the performance. [Us, the ethnographers], should consider asking student affairs and the [student newspaper] to provide information regarding the stance.

6. What stance did your department take towards the performance?
N/A

7. As an officer, what was your role in developing this department’s stance towards the NWC?
N/A

8. What kind of reaction to the play did your department expect to see on campus?
We were surprised that not all of the racialized units were in solidarity. Why would you not oppose this performance, a continuation of problematic language—we were troubled. We also were surprised that the performance was worse than we thought. We were really surprised that this show was not really about dismantling stereotypes. And who’s the [performance center’s] audience? A lot of people left the Q & A session afterwards.

9. In retrospect, how do you feel about your department’s stance towards the play?
10. How do you feel the play impacts racial stereotypes?

It affirmed them. I asked a [young family member who went to the show] this question: he responded, “Blacks have big penises. Asians are smart. Mexicans need green cards and they work hard.”

Second Interview: (Robert Mejia)

Question 1: What has your experience regarding race relationships been like on this campus?

“Strained at worse. People are working through it.” He said that he feels that the relationships are fine and there is simply a “perception of strained relationships.”

Question 2: What role has the Asian American Studies Program played in your experiences here?

He said that it is here "to educate and disseminate" and is "contributing to making campus climate better."

Question 3: How did you first hear about that play?

Through the New York Times.

Question 4: What where your initial thought and feelings about it?

He had thought it had mass appeal from the reviews he had read. He
said it was a "liberal, multi-cultural idea around race." Ultimately he did say he thought it was "shallow, awful and not funny." His main concerns with the play had to do with the form it took, spoken word, more than the material presented.

Question 5: What encouraged you to go see the play?

He did not see it. Once again he said he did not like the art form of spoken word performance.

Question 6: How do you feel the play impacts racial stereotypes?

Again "not the best medium to talk about racial stereotypes." He was careful to point out that was "not morally, aesthetically." He said the play should simply be looked at as "for amusement and entertainment not education."

Question 7: What stance does your program take towards the performance?

He started off somewhat defensively in regards to their perceived neutral stance saying "discussions around NWC were not intellectually based." He "did not like the knee-jerk reaction" talking about the letter that went out from the African American program. He said they wanted "conversation in order to understand the play and then make a judgement." He also was upset because he "felt that because they did not take a boycott stance they were lumped into supporting it." He said "the issue is the structure of decision making understanding cross cultural issues." He said they were taking a "not neutral but an intelligent position." He also found it interesting how people "waffled around supporting and boycotting the play."
Once I was done asking questions he continued talking for quite a while:

He said the play "didn’t affect campus climate to the extent of impairing or fracturing relationships." "When it comes down to who has the voice in deciding these entertainments it should of gone down without the hoopla. It was all for nothing." "To say a performance can be racist denies the audience interpretation." "Words are words and they need to be contextualized." We need to understand why people are using words and the history behind it." "We need better forums to stage this attempt to educate the campus." "Bringing eloquent speakers are more racist than a group of 3 performers." "Irritated that so many resources were spent on this play. Could have been better teaching opportunities." "Talking about the play in the classroom is important."

**Student Interviews:**

**Interview #1:**

- What did you think of the play?

I give it a positive response. It brought out jokes about stereotypes. It was very effective in getting its point across. It wasn’t just another lecture; it was comedy with a serious point. It wasn’t dry.

- What did you see as strengths of the play?

It didn’t drag out its message. They presented a serious message in a funny way. It wasn’t boring.

- What suggestions could you offer that might improve the play?

I would suggest more advertising; it lacked advertising. Not many people knew about it. I believe they executed the play very well; I don’t see
much room for improvement. In regards to the title of the show, I would spell out all three words.

-What about this play would you do differently?

I would have engagement activities a week before the performances. I would follow-up about a month after the show and ask, via surveys, what audience members took away from the play.

-Would you recommend this production to others? Why or why not?

I definitely would. I would recommend it to everyone. I would tell them that they would have a good time.

-What do you see as the implications of this play on the UIUC campus?

Not too much. Not a lot of people saw it. It’ll fade from people’s memory.

-What effect do you see this play having on stereotypes?

I don’t believe that this play will perpetuate stereotypes. Things will stay the same. People who should have seen it didn’t.

-What did you see as the purpose of this play?

The purpose of this play was to stop stereotypes and to get across the message that we’re all equal.

-What did you take away from the play?
Nothing really.

-How did it help you to think about the purpose of the play?

Nothing.

-How do you think issues/matters pertaining to race should be discussed?

I believe that issues/matters pertaining to race should be discussed through comedy. Lectures are too dry and boring. You begin to tune them out. If not comedy, it should be some form of entertainment.

Interview #2:

-What did you think of the play?

I enjoyed it. I respected it as a piece of art. Actors set out to do what they wanted to do.

-What did you see as strengths of the play?

Each one of them had a conception as to what it is to be an actor; the quality of their acting was good. It was a great performance and, overall, entertaining.

-What suggestions could you offer that might improve the play?

I would change the “Top Ten” list. I would attribute historically great things and people (Martin Luther King Jr.) to each racial category (i.e. “Let my words be as powerful as MLK Jr.”).
- What about this play would you do differently?

I didn’t understand what the title was trying to convey before the show, talks, and engagement activities. I, at first, made negative assumptions. Before beginning the engagement activities, I would first have a talk discussing as to how people should approach the issue of “race” through the media.

- Would you recommend this production to others? Why or why not?

I would recommend this show to others, but I would tell them to watch it with an open mind. I believe that they would have really good conversations about the play and “race” in general. It would give people insight. The producing was very intentional. People laughed when they were supposed to, and people were quiet when they were supposed to.

- What do you see as the implications of this play on the UIUC campus?

This play gave us a lot to talk about; a lot of people were able to see it. It was one more avenue of addressing race.

- What effect do you see this play having on stereotypes?

I actually learned more about stereotypes; I was unaware of some. Taken with a narrow mind, this play will perpetuate stereotypes. However, it does have the potential to change the hearts of those who came to see it with an open mind.

- What did you see as the purpose of this play?

I thought the purpose of this play was to express the theme of one struggling with their racial identity in America. The actors presented their stories. They built up the stereotypes and then broke them down. This play shows how people can look past their differences and become
friends.

-What did you take away from the play?

I took away a greater understanding of how people on our campus react to racial issues.

-How did it help you to think about the purpose of the play?

It helped me think as to how I could better serve our campus by seeing their reactions to the play.

-How do you think issues/matters pertaining to race should be discussed?

Issues/matters pertaining to race should be discussed in a delicate fashion with lots of thought. Race should be treated like ethnicity. Things like “Boxes & Walls are good. We should take about race as if it’s not taboo. We should be able to discuss race in an enjoyable way, without argument, that doesn’t offend people.

Interview #3:

-What did you think of the play?

I thought it was highly inappropriate. It wasn’t funny. It was a mockery of minorities and specifically black, Asian, and Hispanic individuals. I thought it was an excuse, especially for white people, to laugh at stereotypes.

-What did you see as strengths of the play?
It got people to laugh. It enabled the actors to make money; I believe that [money] is all that motivates them.

-What suggestions could you offer that might improve the play?

I don’t believe that they should have even done the play. However, since they did, I would suggest that they start by taking out the racial slurs. I would add substance to the play. It failed to send out a message.

-What about this play would you do differently?

I would add more dialogue’s the week before the play arrived on a campus. I would want to make the play more serious; I would remove the comedy aspect from it entirely. Everything is not a laughing matter.

-Would you recommend this production to others? Why or why not?

No, I would not. The show lacked substance. It exists only to make money and make a mockery of minorities/nonwhites.

-What do you see as the implications of this play on the UIUC campus?

It doesn’t help the campus mission at all. It further perpetuates a negative and tense racial climate.

-What effect do you see this play having on stereotypes?

This play tells people that it’s okay to laugh at and make fun of stereotypes. It helps to justify racially-themed parties.

-What did you see as the purpose of this play?
The purpose of this play was for the performers to make money.

-What did you take away from the play?
I learned that people, both whites and nonwhites, don’t take racism seriously.

-How did it help you to think about the purpose of the play?
It made me realize that the actors were performing for the sake of making money. This included mimicking their cultures, ancestors, and histories.

-How do you think issues/matters pertaining to race should be discussed?
I think that issues/matters pertaining to race should be discussed in a serious manner. It should not be made as a joke.

Interview #4:

-What did you think of the play?
I thought it was well put together, but I didn’t think it was too entertaining. Though I suppose that it was not its intent.

-What did you see as strengths of the play?
Its main strength was its controversial nature because it stimulated discussion between views.
-What suggestions could you offer that might improve the play?

I can’t think of anything to improve the play at this time.

-What about this play would you do differently?

I wouldn’t do anything differently.

-Would you recommend this production to others? Why or why not?

I would. Simply put, it was thought provoking and discussion starting. I think it is important.

-What do you see as the implications of this play on the UIUC campus?

I think it shows how much hidden tension there is between races. I also think it demonstrates that people know these issues exist and need to be brought to light/disussed.

-What effect do you see this play having on stereotypes?

I don’t think it will change people’s stereotypical views. However, I do think it will raise awareness that stereotypes exist, and I think the play provoked discussion about stereotypes. Finally, it can only serve to foster an environment for growth and change.
-What did you see as the purpose of this play?

Basically, what I said above. The purpose was to stimulate discussion, open the lines to communication, and recognize the differences between people.

-What did you take away from the play?

A more full understanding of the impact of stereotyping others.

-How did it help you to think about the purpose of the play?

It helped me because it made me realize what I saw and how to apply it to life.

-How do you think issues/matters pertaining to race should be discussed?

I think race needs to be discussed candidly. I feel like people sweep issues under the rug because they feel like they will offend someone. Without candidness, issues cannot be solved.

Interview #5: (Robert Mejia)

-What did you think of the play?

I’ve done lots of multicultural work. The net effect is good. There were some bad aspects: such as sexism towards women. And there were no women. They referred to genitals a lot. [This school] has a history of racism on campus. They also did not represent that many racial experiences. For instance, there were no Native Americans.
- What did you see as the strengths of this performance?
It was funny.

-What suggestions would you offer that might improve the play?
Get rid of the sexualization of women. It is a very different experience being a woman of color versus a man of color. Try to bring in female actors. Their script currently allows for the inclusion of female actors in the narration. For instance, they could have a woman involved during the L.A. to Atlanta story.

-What about this play would you do differently?
N/A

-Would you recommend this production to others?
I would recommend that everyone see it cause it might make you think.

-What effect do you see this play having on stereotypes?
The message that they were sending was that what they looked like wasn’t what they were on the inside.

-What did you see as the purpose of this play? (before seeing it).
It was about the usage of language.
-What did you take away from the play?
I actually found myself using the [racial slurs]. I was just joking, but I guess joking is another form of being ignorant. It may be introducing people to this terminology.

-How do you think issues/matters pertaining to race should be discussed?
Forum and/or lectures are good. But a majority of those who attend are probably liberal. You keep attracting the same crowd. You should go straight to councils, such as the Greek and Pan-Hellenic council. They are what we are up against. Also, there is a lot of self-segregation here. People are upset of misidentification. I took a class here, in psychology, and I learned we cannot only blame white people. Group dialogue is necessary.

Discuss: Document Analysis:
We analyzed two letters sent between a university administrator and Professor Sundiata Cha-Jua of the African American Studies Department. The first letter documents Sundiata’s bitter displeasure with the invitation of N*W*C. He expressed his disappointment and anger in the
university administrator’s choice to invite N*W*C to campus without discussing the matter with him or his fellow department members (in which he says to have spoken on their behalf). Cha-Jua was “dismayed that [the university administrator] made the decision to bring a ‘play’ which even [he agreed] is controversial without first consulting people of color on campus and in the community, especially those who study, teach and regularly engage these issues.” Much of the letter then entailed the many issues and problems that Cha-Jua had with N*W*C and why he did not want it playing at this university. He viewed N*W*C as “simplistic and shortsighted [that aimed] to challenge [individuals’] personal prejudices by performing stereotypes and using offensive racial slurs.” He simply believed the play to be in “poor quality and in poor taste.” Cha-Jua did not doubt the university administrator’s “good intentions,” but he felt that the university administrator’s “decision to impose this ‘play’ on [ethnic faculty members and other people of color] without consultation [represented] the height of white liberal arrogance!”

In his letter responding to Professor Cha-Jua, the university administrator defended his decision to invite N*W*C to the school stating that N*W*C is “a work that holds constructive value for our campus and community.” He understood why and regretted the fact that ethnic faculty members were upset at him, but still supported his original decision arguing that “individuals [should] be able to decide for themselves the value of work, such as N*W*C.” He then follows by listing off past works that, in his view, brought “culturally diverse aesthetic experiences that [stretched] across the performance disciplines and points of cultural origin.” Unlike his colleague, the university administrator’s tone, in his letter, emphasizes cooperation and resolve. In fact, he looks at this disagreement as an opportunity to work with Cha-Jua and other ethnic faculty members in “[generating] as much positive change as possible [at the university] and in the broader community.”

Field Notes:

(A) What Audience Members were Laughing At/Degree of Laughter: Audience member demographics were quite diverse. Racial demographics included Caucasians, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans (including Indian Americans and Middle-Eastern Americans). In observing audience members, I noticed certain aspects of the show that garnered more intense laughter than others. At the show’s opening, many of the audience members laughed at Raphael and Alan when chanting their respective racial slurs, but when Miles entered the stage chanting the N-word repeatedly, everyone broke out into laughter. In fact, how
audience members reacted to the opening scene, where the actors were chanting racial slurs, was no different from the rest of the show. With each racial stereotype mentioned, the audience erupted in laughter. Interestingly enough, when Miles used African American stereotypes, the majority of audience members laughed more intensely than they did at the Latino or Asian stereotypes used by Raphael and Alan, respectively. This led me to believe that, for whatever reason, audience members may have been more disposed to finding humor in African American stereotypes. Audience members laughed harder when, for instance, Miles imitated stereotypical African American dialect. It was, indeed, the case, however, that people of all demographic backgrounds, in attendance, were laughing at stereotypes; that is undeniable. Audience members did laugh when the actors made fun of Caucasian stereotypes. Specifically, many Caucasians laughed at jokes regarding “white” vernacular.  

(B) Specific/General Reactions from Audience Members:  
Distinguishable utterances or overheard conversations held between and among audience members helped me to gain insight as to what some thought about the play. I sat behind five Caucasian individuals who continuously laughed at African American jokes. In fact, when leaning over to write my notes (I had to lean over to get some light) I overheard one Caucasian male saying to another Caucasian male, “That’s so true!” The other Caucasian male responded with, “That’s why it’s funny bro.” Other times, audience members reacted to some of the jokes centering on stereotypes in a way that gave me the impression that they knew just how ridiculous the stereotypes were. Specifically, instead of laughing, “Ha-ha...that’s hilarious and true,” they laughed, “Ha-ha...wow...that’s ridiculous.” Sitting besides me, throughout the show, was a Caucasian woman who was about my age. We engaged in small talk, and after a few moments, she asked me why I had a notebook with me. I, of course, did not want to tell her I was conducting observational research, so I told her, simply, that I was taking notes in order to help myself later write a summary of the production. I asked her as to why she came to see the show, and she responded, “I just came here for kicks...no reason in particular. I like stuff that pertains to racial issues, and I thought why not?” She told me that she had heard negative critiques of the production in that people reported being offended. After saying such, she did go out of her way to tell me that “[she] is not easily offended” and “didn’t quite see what all the fuss was about.

However, there were clear examples of bitter distaste with the show. Midway through the show, I noticed about maybe five to ten individuals
leaving the auditorium; they never came back. This reinforced the notion that even though it seemed as if most of the people in attendance “got it,” others still did not (or were completely offended that they had to leave). I was unable to make detailed descriptions about the individuals who left because they had been sitting on the opposite side of the auditorium from where I was sitting. I did notice, though, that they were all African Americans. Of the individuals who left, there were more women than men.

When someone is accused of “playing the race card,” they are accused of purposefully bringing race into an issue or debate to gain some degree of advantage. The skit involving the use and discussion of “race cards” did not draw immense laughter amongst non-whites. Overall, this skit failed to attract much laughter from both whites and non-whites indicating that audience members, in general, found the “race card” skit to perhaps not be funny or even offensive. To accuse someone of “playing the race card,” is understood as an attempt by the accuser to obfuscate an issue. By making fun of how non-whites “get their ‘race card’” and how they should “not leave home without [one]” indicates, perhaps, to the audience that the actors, themselves, believe there to be an overall frivolous an unwarranted mentioning of race in matters where it shouldn’t belong. Audience members did not find this skit funny, in my opinion, because perhaps they see the salience of race covering and expanding to many different issues. Furthermore, by poking fun at “race cards” and their “frivolous” usage, audience members, I suggest, perceive the actors as unknowingly obfuscating matters where race is thought to be involved.

Regardless as to what audience members laughed at or to what extent, it appeared as though most of those in attendance subscribed to the actors’ main message or theme: people of different ‘races’ and/or cultures “have more in common with each other than one would think.” Overall, every act which emphasized the theme of unity and/or self-love received a thunderous applause. When the actors began their skit involving iconic American/white figures (Santa Claus, Superman, Jesus, etc.), much of the audience found it funny and many applauded to show, what I believed to be, appreciation for tackling an issue that does not seem to garner much attention within the mainstream discussion(s) regarding race and racism. When the show came to close (and the auditorium faded to black), it ended with a standing ovation.
The post-show Q & A session focused on mainly the actors’ responses to questions proposed by audience members. However, answers to these questions generated some significant and noteworthy responses from those audience members remaining in the auditorium. In terms of demographics, most of the remaining audience members were non-white. There seemed to be an even distribution of males and females. Early in the session, an African American woman asked why the actors chose to wear all white at the end of the show. The actors responded that they decided to use white because that color lit better under the stage lights. In addition, they went on to say that white was used because it is a neutral color. It was meant to represent a blank page, and it was also used to show a unity among the actors. When asked by another African American woman about whether they thought that they were perpetuating stereotypes, the actors responded by saying that they chose to incorporate the use of stereotypes because they, first, wanted to “bring them up.” Then, they wanted to “twist them” and, finally, turn them “on their heads.” Alan then went on to say that as the production went on, stereotypes are further and continuously broken down. After this response from the actors, a Caucasian male stood up from his seat and stated that it had, in fact, worked for him. Applause from fellow audience members ensued. Not long afterwards, an African American woman asked the actors to list a few of the positive reasons for being African American; she believed that the actors only stated negative African American stereotypes as reasons for wanting to be black. The actors responded by saying that they, in fact, did state positive reasons for wanting to be black. Positive reasons included being “soulful” and “beautiful.” This answer did not please the woman, and she stated to Miles, “You still haven’t answered my question.” Miles responded by saying, “Yes I did. I said many positive things, such as African Americans being ‘soulful’ and ‘beautiful.’” The woman discontinued her questioning, but the audience seemed displeased with Miles’s response: shaking heads and groans expressing disappointment. Towards the end of the discussion, a professor from this large Midwestern university asked a question regarding the play’s alleged role in its perpetuation of racism. He was an African American male, somewhere in his late thirties or forties, and wore a light brown dress shirt with dark brown or black dress pants. He appeared livid when asking his question. He ranted about white students wearing Chief t-shirts and being apathetic to, or completely unaware of, racism on campus. As he was ranting, the majority of remaining audience members applauded in approval of his question. Accordingly, I felt that they were in agreement. The actors expressed their concern and shared in his frustration, but when responding to his accusation of them perpetuating stereotypes, they said that their play isn’t “designed to do that” and that their production only seeks to be a
catalyst for discussing racial discourse. This response was followed by applause, but it was clearly not as thunderous as the professor’s.

Interviews:

(A) University Administrator:
The university administrator supported his decision in inviting N*W*C to the campus’s performing arts center. He began the interview by telling a story of how he, while in his youth, was harassed and beaten by a handful of white individuals for not revealing information as to where they could find blacks and Hispanics to assault. He noted that incident as being a life defining experience which catapulted him into civil rights issues. While working at the performing arts center he sees the “importance of mixing both personal and professional aspects.” Because issues pertaining to race and racism have occupied the better half of his life and because N*W*C, in his opinion, sought to help counter racial misconceptions, as well as foster positive implications for the university’s climate, he thought it in the university’s interests to invite N*W*C.

After viewing N*W*C, he felt even stronger about his decision to invite the play to campus. At first glance, he was not interested in the play; he said that “the title turned him off from it; it was unattractive.” However, after hearing about the acclaim it had received while on other college campuses, he chose to investigate it further. His decision to finally invite the play was based on the following: his admiration for the “authenticity” that drove the actors to do such as piece, his interest in autobiographical work, the notion that the actors were “[delving] into matters pertaining to race and racism,” and the potential value this play had in helping to improve campus climate. He said that in looking for pieces of work to have on any college campus, “one should look for art that is genuine, creative, and has the potential to contribute in a positive and meaningful way.” However, after taking a few moments, he did concede that he was disappointed how N*W*C didn’t have as much of a constructive impact here as it had in other locales.

When asked if his campus was ready for a play like N*W*C, he answered, “Yes I do.” We can have [a play like] this without ‘race fights.’ We’re better as a result of seeing [this] production.” He says we should not be afraid of a play like N*W*C if we believe in an academic mindset, and that we should be able to discuss issues pertaining to race and racism without becoming uncivil. He understands people’s criticisms of the play,
but, nevertheless, states that N*W*C is no magical solution to racial issues; it is one small piece of a massive effort to fight ideas of racism. He believes that if we focus so much on making the “perfect decision,” we will never get anywhere with anything. However, after pausing a few moments, he expressed sadness and admitted that it did, in fact, hurt him to know that some people were upset and offended by the show. The university administrator, furthermore, stated that “people expressed appreciation for [the invitation] of N*W*C.”

When asked if he would bring N*W*C back to campus, he said yes, “but if they did come back, he would [prefer that they] perform a different project.” At the end of the interview, he concludes by saying that we should support up-and-coming artists. “[They] are learning and getting better with more experience.” In the end, while recognizing some of N*W*C’s shortcomings, as well as other people’s distaste with the play, he still believed that he was right in inviting the actors to perform on his campus. If he could do it again, he would.

(B) Ethnic Faculty Members:
Two ethnic faculty members from two distinct academic departments were interviewed regarding their feelings towards and reactions to N*W*C. The first faculty member interviewed “didn’t think [the play] was a moment of ill intent.” However, she thought its presentation was problematic. She went on to add that many other ethnic faculty members were upset at the pressure given to publicize the play. “The administration pressured us to encourage our students to attend the performance.” Regarding the kind of reaction she expected to see on campus, she was “surprised that not all of the racialized units were in solidarity.” She also felt that the show was much worse than what she was expecting. “[The] show was not really about dismantling stereotypes.” When asked as to how this play impacts racial stereotypes, she responded by stating that “it affirmed them.” She adds, “I asked a [young family member who went to the show that same] question. He responded, ‘Blacks have big penises. Asians are smart. Mexicans need green cards and they work hard.’”
The second ethnic faculty member interviewed thought initially that the play was “shallow, awful and not funny.” This ethnic faculty member did not see the actual play, so his responses stem from initial thoughts and preconceptions. His main concerns with the play had to do with the form it took and its spoken word technique. He stated that the chosen technique (comedy and spoken word) was “not the best medium to talk about racial stereotypes.” This play, in his opinion, should only be used “for amusement and entertainment [purposes only], not [educational].” He didn’t feel that discussions surrounding N^W^C were “intellectually based.” He did not like the “knee-jerk reaction” from other ethnic faculty members (specifically referencing Professor Cha-Jua’s letter). He said that he and his department wanted to converse with other faculty members, students, and intellectuals in order to better understand the play and then judge it. Because he and his department chose not to boycott the play, they were, therefore, made to appear as if they supported it. This he described with much frustration. He said that he and his department were taking “not [a] neutral but, [rather], intelligent position.” He also found it interesting how people “waffled around supporting and boycotting the play.” He said the play “didn’t affect campus climate to the extent of impairing or fracturing relationships. To say a performance can be racist,” he added, “denies the audience’s interpretation. Words are words, and they need to be contextualized. We need to understand why people are using words and the history behind it. We need better forums to stage this attempt to educate the campus.” He claimed that “bringing [to campus] eloquent speakers are more racist than a group of three performers.” In the end, he was irritated that “so many resources were spent on this play.”

(C) Students:

In total, five students were interviewed. Of the five, one identified as African American, one as Latino, two as Asian, and one as Middle-Eastern. What proceeds is an examination of each student’s interview followed by a summary analysis.

Student # 1: This student identified himself as an Asian male. Taken as a whole, this student enjoyed N^W^C. He felt that this play was “very effective” in getting its message of unity and equality across to the audience. Consequently, he would recommend this play to everybody believing that they would have “a good time.” Nevertheless, he did not see this play having heavy implications on campus climate. In his opinion, few people attended the performances. He criticized the play in that it
was not advertised enough. In time, he felt, N*W*C would simply fade out of everyone’s memory. He believed this play to have little or no effect on stereotypes; therefore, he anticipated his school’s campus climate to remain unchanged. Furthermore, this student believes that comedy is the medium in which matters pertaining to race should be discussed. He feels that lectures and seminars “are too dry and boring.” If nothing else, he adds, “[the medium] should be some form of entertainment.”

Student # 2: This student identified herself as an Asian female. She “respected [N*W*C] as a piece of art” and believed the play to be entertaining. She would recommend this show to others, but only under the condition that they watch it with an open mind. She believes that this play would foster “good conversations about ‘race’” in general. “It would give people insight.” She also marveled at the play’s set-up. “[Production] was very intentional. People laughed when they were supposed to, and people were quiet when they were supposed to.” She stated that she had actually learned more about stereotypes through N*W*C; there were some negative stereotypes that she had previously been unaware of (she did not specify). “Taken with a narrow mind,” she goes on, “this play will perpetuate stereotypes. However, it does have the potential to change the hearts of those who come to see it with an open mind.” From the play, she took away a greater understanding of how students and faculty on her campus react to racial issues. By observing people’s reactions to N*W*C, she feels better able serve her campus community. She concludes by expressing her beliefs as to how issues/matters pertaining to race should be discussed. “Issues pertaining to race should be discussed in a delicate fashion with lots of thought. Race should be treated like ethnicity. [People] should [be able to] talk about race as if it’s not taboo. [Everyone] should be able to discuss race in an enjoyable way, without argument, that doesn’t offend people.” N*W*C works for this student because, according to her, it shows how people can look past their differences and become friends.

Student # 3: This student identified himself as a Hispanic male. This student hated everything about N*W*C. He thought that the play “was highly inappropriate.” He viewed it as a mockery of minorities and specifically black, Asian, and Hispanic individuals. In general, he thought “it was an excuse, especially for white students, to laugh at negative racial stereotypes.” He believed that the actors were motivated by money, and that the play lacked substance. If he could offer any suggestions to the actors, he would advise them to not even perform the play. Furthermore, he believes this play to only perpetuate a hostile racial climate with its use of stereotypes. This student expressed great
concern over the possible effects this play would have on stereotypes. He felt that this play would “tell students that it’s okay to laugh at and make fun of stereotypes.” Moreover, he saw this play as working to help justify last year’s racially-themed parties. When asked if he learned anything from the play, he said that he learned that people (whites and non-whites) fail to take racism seriously. Accordingly, he stressed that issues/matters pertaining to race should be discussed “in a serious manner” and not made out to be a joke.

Student # 4: This student identified himself as an African American male. In general, he thought that the play was well put together, but he did not believe it to be entertaining. According to him, what made the play strong was its controversial nature. He liked how the play spoke “candidly” about race and how it, through its candid presentation, brought racial issues to the forefront of people’s minds. He believes that the play serves to show as to how much hidden tension there is among races. Furthermore, he sees the play as evidence of people being knowledgeable about such racial tensions. However, regarding its effects on stereotypes, he “[did] not think the play would have much affect on people’s stereotypical views.” However, he does believe that the play will “raise awareness that stereotypes exist.” and “provoke discussions about [such] stereotypes.” Overall, he feels N*W*C can only serve to foster an environment for growth and change. He would recommend this play to others.

Student # 5: This student identified herself as a Middle-Eastern female. She felt that “the net effect [was] good” concerning N*W*C, and that, overall, it was funny. However, she did find some fault with the play: sexism towards women, the lack of women in the show, and the constant mentioning of the male genitalia. She also saw N*W*C as failing to represent all the possible racial experiences. “For instance, she states, “there were no Native Americans [in the play].” To improve the play, she suggests getting rid of the “sexualization of women.” She stressed that there is a “very different experience being a woman of color versus a man of color.” Furthermore, she felt that the script allows for the inclusion of female actors and believes that the play should change accordingly. Nonetheless, N*W*C is a play that she would recommend to others. “It makes you think,” she asserts. She believed that the play was attempting to dispel negative racial stereotypes. She saw the play as trying to persuade people to look and judge individuals from within (character) rather than without (skin color). When asked what medium she would employ to discuss racial issues, she answered with that of forums and/or lectures. She felt that those individuals who “needed” to
see the play had not seen it. She emphasized the importance of reaching to new crowds and getting those who are mindful of racial issues to see the play. This is more a critique of the university’s failure to engage the whole campus community in racial dialogue than it is of N*W*C.

The university administrator defended his decision in inviting N*W*C to campus. While recognizing some of N*W*C’s shortcomings, as well as other people’s distaste with the play, he still believed that he was right in inviting the actors to perform on his campus. If he could do it again, he would. Moreover, the two faculty members did not care for the play. However, they did differ in the perceived implications N*W*C would have on campus climate. One faculty member, while negatively assessing the play, thought its implications on campus climate would be minimal. The other faculty member disliked every aspect of N*W*C and believed that it would perpetuate the use of negative racial stereotypes. Out of the five student interviewees, four found the play enjoyable and valuable. The one student interviewee who disliked the play hated every aspect of it. To him, N*W*C made a charade of racial stereotypes. In his mind, the play had no value or substance. While everyone agreed that N*W*C had its drawbacks, those who reacted positively to the play felt that N*W*C was a step in the right direction in helping to fight prejudice, bias, discrimination, and injustice. These four students saw N*W*C as a starting point for future dialogue on racial issues. Moreover, the answer of what medium serves best to discuss issues of race revealed a near consensus among respondents. The majority of respondents felt that issues/matters pertaining to race should be discussed in a delicate but candid context that seeks not to offend anyone nor lessen the seriousness of race itself. Whatever medium chosen must be able to garner people’s attention without boring them.