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Embodying Formal Authority through Courageous Leadership

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Reed, Mandisa

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Embodying Formal Authority through Courageous Leadership

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Stage Management)

by

Mandisa Reed

Committee in charge:

Charles Means, Chair  
Marco Barricelli  
Lisa Porter  
Manuel Rotenberg  
Deborah Stein

2017

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The Thesis of Mandisa Reed is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2017

## DEDICATION

To my mum and dad, granny and Steve – for always believing in the best of me.

This is for everyone battling their demons – for one cannot know the power of light without experiencing sprinkles of darkness.

To all the black stage managers – we are unicorns. The world needs us.

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File 4. *Native Son* Calling Pages 106-115 (End of Show)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my family, who never questioned my choice to work in the arts. Your continued and grounding love and support is invaluable.

To the three sisters I never knew I needed: Kamra, Hsiu-I, and Jessie. I am truly in awe of the love and admiration I have for you all. I have learned so much from three of you, and am inspired by your activism and fierceness.

Monica Cuoco, thank you for being unapologetically you. Your encouragement and guidance through a tough process is very much appreciated.

Chuck and Lisa – thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you for asking the tough questions, for imparting your wisdom, for choosing me at just the right time, and for being so flexible and in service to your students.



## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Embodying Formal Authority through Courageous Leadership

by

Mandisa Reed

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Stage Management)

University of California, San Diego, 2017

Professor Charles Means, Chair

Throughout the process of *Native Son*, it was imperative for me to create a strong sense of community among my collaborators and facilitate a safe, open environment in which to explore the delicate subject matter of the play. I approached this by cultivating my informal authority: building strong connections with the company by actively seeking trusting relationships and demonstrating my unwavering commitment to the collaboration. What proved challenging was exercising my formal authority and trusting my instinct to courageously initiate challenging conversations. When the process required

me to embrace the full responsibility of the formal leader, I allowed fear and the weight of judgment and uncertainty to suppress my voice and retreat.

In the play, the character of Bigger struggles to honor his instincts and trust his heart to make the right choice. Bigger is persuaded by The Black Rat, his inner voice, to play it safe and act against his truth. This process has taught me that embodying vulnerability and allowing my instincts to guide me through the many challenging situations that arise make me a resilient and compassionate leader. By advocating for my collaborators and myself, taking big risks, and using adaptive language, I can influence the process in innumerable ways. I know I embody the necessary tools to lead authentically, and intend to further invest in the explicit responsibility required to lead artistic collaborative processes both informally and formally.