

Portland, Oregon lies within the traditional homelands of the Multnomah, Oregon City Tumwater, Watlala, and Clackamas Chinooks and the Tualatin Kalapuya Peoples who were relocated to the Grand Ronde Reservation under the Kalapuya etc., 1855, ratified treaty (also known as the Willamette Valley Treaty, 1855). Today, these Tribes are a part of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. The Grand Ronde people continue to maintain a connection to their ancestral homelands and maintain their traditional cultural practices.

Hello and welcome to my thesis presentation. I am Veronica Taylor. I'm a second semester thesis student Majoring in General fine arts . I was born and raised in the Bay Area in California. I moved to Portland in the summer of 2018 after graduating from Oakland School for the Arts. I began attending Oregon College of Arts and Crafts but it unfortunately shut down. I then transferred schools and began attending PNCA in fall of 2019. At PNCA I dove into making work that explores my identity and mixed-ness with materials that speak to the subject matter of the specific work.

I grew up in a diverse area of California, the Bay Area, but not a very diverse city. My parents made a huge effort to get me out of our small town to see what Oakland or San Francisco had to offer. Most of what they had, that Alameda was lacking, was diversity and inclusion. At some point though, we had to go back to our townhome in the suburbs. I stuck out like a sore thumb, or at least it felt like I did. For a long time I tried to be like the people I was surrounded by. I was confused and unsure where and if I fit in. Hair, in particular, was/is a huge deal to me and something I struggled with as a child. I looked at both sides of my family and realized I didn't look like either of them when I was young. I just didn't understand how I could look so different from my own parents.

Especially after seeing how alike my classmates looked to their families. I grew up watching my maternal grandmother curl her blonde short hair every morning. Then I'd also see my paternal grandmother put conditioner, rollers, and a silk scarf on every night. I was never sure how my hair fit in; But it was clear that hair, in general, is of high importance. Braids were something I always wanted but feared asking for.

I have made a braided quilt about my ancestry and my internal struggle with being mixed. The braids symbolize my attempts to be one race or the other. Braids were something I felt like I couldn't have because I wasn't Black enough or was too white. Since then I've realized I am simply both and am not too much of one or the other. The yarn is "man-made" acrylic and speaks to me creating my own experience with tools I have available. These tools are my ancestry and it informs my existence. This quilt is about embracing the awkwardness of being mixed and a refusal to be one or the other. I like to think of this project as something that has enabled me to tie both sides together. It points at the differences in both sides and the white supremacist logic that forces me one way or the other. But I have created a unified culture that is a resolution to these issues. Rather than simply pointing to their differences and my struggle as a bi-racial child I found a personal resolution in my work. I unified my ancestors by telling their stories in my quilt and tied me and my own experience in with braiding. I braided their stories; I feel that this action brought me closer to my ancestors and helped reiterate that my existence and experience is informed by their own. I embraced and took influence from the traditions of my ancestors, quilting, but made it my own. I illustrated the comfort in old stories being passed down with the look of a "traditional" quilt and the plushness of my braids. I also acknowledged that this unification of both

sides is something new and tedious with a delicate and distinctive construction and composition.

My quilt has 20 squares total; Six squares about my immediate family and seven for my maternal and paternal lineage.

Many of the squares have multiple meanings, however, the maternal and paternal side can be paired up into categories.

- place where gparents met
- signif part of g parent's lives
- g great and g grand father's immigration
- gg mothers passions
- gg mothers origin
- somethings each side is "known for"
- something each side is proud of

My research included accessing ancestry.com, speaking with family members, and looking at contemporary Black female quilt makers. My dad and I created an ancestry tree together when I was in middle school on a trip to Atlanta. We put in all the information he and my grandmother knew. My mom's side is a bit better equipped when it comes to finding dates. We have a family bible and records that a family member gathered in her own research. When speaking to family members I tried to get them to tell stories so I would have something to abstract. Most of the subjects or events in my quilt I was not alive for or do not remember well so it was important for me to place myself in each period of time to design the square.

For example My maternal grandparents began dating on October 12th, 1962. she explained it in a text message to me “We went to dinner at The Gourmet Room at Town and Country. and then went to the Loma theater in Point Loma to see the movie Cleopatra with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton...Papa bought a suit for it and I borrowed a dress from a girlfriend because I didn't have any semi dressy dresses.” My grandparents are the only couple close to me that was together when I grew up and is still together, their relationship is one I looked up to and one I always wanted for myself. I decided to depict their union by abstracting elements from the menu of the restaurant they had their first date at, The Gourmet Room at Town and Country. I found a copy of it from 1962 and used the cranes and the stars on the cover to make my square. I used red as the background because it was the background of the menu.

For each square I found a symbol or motif that was somehow a part of the subject/event. And each square has a story to go with it, each of them are in my thesis paper for those who are interested.

One of my favorite stories to tell is of how my parents met:

My parents met in Zura hall at San Diego State University in 1984. My mom was dropped off at the dorms by her parents who left her with a six-pack of beer. Once her parents left she followed the music she heard down the hallway with her beer in hand. She found herself in a dorm room with my dad and all of his friends. My dad had begun college at Laney Community College in Oakland in 1982 and had also just moved into the dorm. My mother had just graduated from her highschool in Santa Barbara. They were together ever since they met in 1984 and were together for a total of 33 years

when he passed. Today, April 25th would have been their 30th wedding anniversary. I chose the colors for this square to mimic those of the San Diego State colors. Zura Hall, and San Diego in general, was also famous for their Spanish architecture and large arches. I decided to abstract the famous arches and assign them the school colors.

As I mentioned before my mother's side was a bit better equipped for ancestral research. A great aunt of mine had the same love for ancestry research as I do. She did a deep dive in the 1960s using a family bible and genealogy records provided by the church of the latter-day saints. This bible was printed in 1868 and has been in my family since then. It contains everyone's birth, death, descendants, as well as obituaries or newspaper clippings if available. It was given to me for this project. My aunt traced our family to our origins in North America. We come from the Lovelands who arrived in 1638. "Widow" Loveland arrived in Wethersfield, Connecticut with her three sons. From them came Abigail Smith who married John Quincy Adams the 2nd president of the United States and birthed the 6th (their son) John Adams. We are related to them through Abigail. I chose to do more research on where the Lovelands resided in England. They lived in Norwich, England. Through my research I was able to find that they were a family of merchants that lived across a field from a church. There was a photo that is suspected to be an almost exact view of what they saw out their front door

since the church has not changed since they were alive. I used this image to attempt to tie in and feel a connection to my more distant relatives. I abstracted it by changing the colors, as I wanted to keep the view of the church somewhat recognizable.

I also did quite a bit of research on the other side of my family. Because they are black and from the United States their records were much less reliable and sparse. My grandfather's name, Billy, was recorded incorrectly several times in his lifetime. I was however able to piece together where my paternal grandmother's family were likely enslaved. It was in Abbeville, South Carolina. The man's name was Armistead Burt, he was a part of congress until he moved back in 1863 to oversee his Orange Hill Plantation in Abbeville. His mansion hosted the Confederate president and is known as the death place of the confederacy as it is where the president decided to end the war. It is now a wedding venue.

My paternal great grandmother ( my dad's maternal grandma), Jessie Davis, was born in Abbeville in 1907. The census lists her family as farmers and farm laborers through her childhood. The man who enslaved her ancestors was also the man to write South Carolina's "Black" laws that made life unbearable for her and her family. She then moved to Chicago, to escape the south. She had 9 kids. My grandmother, Patt Dunn, was the first girl and the fourth child. She grew up in Evanston, Illinois right outside of Chicago. She went to school and ultimately became a nurse. She then met my grandfather, got married and had my dad in 1964.

My paternal grandparents moved to Oakland from Chicago in 1966. My grandmother was a nurse at the Oakland Jail and Highland Hospital. My grandfather came to run his own photography shop on Broadway in Oakland. They lived on Grand Ave, just down the street from the famous Grand Lake Theater. My grandma, my dad, and I went for a stroll on Grand a few months before he passed. My grandma pointed out where they would go for Black Panther Party meetings, in their friend's chicken shop. My dad pointed out where he would meet up with his friends and take the bus to the city. Both of my grandparents were involved in protests in the 1960s and early 70s. I remember my grandma telling me about how my Papa Bill was arrested in Chicago during a MLK protest. She would always note that the only reason she didn't get arrested too was because she was pushing my dad, who was an infant, in his stroller. They were both good friends with Huey P. Newton. My grandmother said he would come over often because he was good friends with them as a couple. She said that he would bring over his different wives as well for them to meet, one time three at once.

My dad would take me for drives as a child and show me his old house, my godfather's house, their k-12 schools, and pretty much every other significant place. Going into Oakland and seeing these special places was always meaningful to me and brought me closer to my dad. I decided to depict the significance of Oakland to my family by illustrating my grandparents house on Grand Ave in front of Lake Merrit a staple of Oakland. And something their house sat down the street from. I chose the Golden State Warriors (it used to be the Oakland Warriors ) colors blue and yellow for the house and background. I decided to leave the lake green as it is in real life.

The other side of my dad's family was really intriguing for me to research. I didn't know my dad's grandpa was from the Bahamas until I was in middle school. It was never talked about much and I don't have any contact with them currently. So I was curious.

My grandpa, Billy Taylor, was born in Miami, Florida in 1934. His mother Cleo Watkins was a maid and his father Kenneth Taylor was a landscaper. My great grandfather Kenneth immigrated to the United States in 1923 from Nassau, Bahamas. My grandfather, Billy, didn't like talking about his childhood. My dad would go and visit his grandpa Ken in the summers and said they did some landscaping together. The naturalization papers list my great grandfather as 20 years old, white (with medium complexion), 6'2 , being 145 pounds, having dark brown hair and light brown eyes, and a scar on his left arm when he entered the country on October 13th, 1923. He was not white but mixed native Bahaman (Taino) and British. He sailed here on the "Frances E" to be the service manager at a tire company. It was exciting for me to begin to picture what his life was like. And what my grandfather's life was growing up. I hadn't even known my grandpa was from Florida before I was told about my great grandfather. I decided to focus on his immigration for this square because it was my entry point to their life. And his immigration and naturalization documents provided so much information. I illustrated the island, Nassau, that he was from in front of a palm tree that signifies Miami. I chose to use vibrant colors for this square to represent the tropical climate.



I also chose to fill the quilt in with green. Green is my favorite color and I see it as something extra to tie my own story/experience into the stories of my ancestors. I have always loved green. Growing up my brother and I's room was half seafoam green (for me) and gray (for him), we each got two walls. My parents didn't want to know my gender when I was born so all my baby clothes and toys were green and yellow. I think that's why I like it so much. It's always been a neutral for me. I specifically chose this shade of green because it is more of a gem tone and fits into the Kool Aid color palette. I was introduced to the palette through the contemporary Black quiltmaker Bisa Butler. Butler frequently uses the palette. The Kool Aid color palette was coined by the group Afri Cobra in the 1960s in Chicago. It's a color palette made by Black people intuitively. It uses vibrant and saturated colors as well as gem tones, speaking to our roots in Africa and the dyes used there. Along with "american colors" like denim blue.

Butler's image sourcing was a large influence for me as well. She uses photos of Black people from the National archive, however, these images don't provide a name, place, or time. Many of the photographs are of people standing on the street. Butler says they are forgotten because they were never correctly acknowledged. And they were nearly actually forgotten until she accessed them. Although Butler's quilts don't provide details such as dates or names they provide a place to properly remember this person. My quilt is a place for me to properly remember, acknowledge, and make a connection to my ancestors.

Because these subjects are so tender :

- I wanted to abstract the images I used to protect myself. I have been interested in abstraction for some time but Rosie Lee Tompkins inspired me to bring that

into my quilt. Tompkins enjoyed keeping her family and art fame separate.

Despite this her works are deeply personal. For example, Tompkins' work *Three Sixes* (1986) is about her family member's birthdays that are all on the 6th. I

really appreciate this gift of personal information with boundaries. She redefined the tradition of quilt making to unify the subject and material while abstracting her experience for personal safety. Some compare it to newspapered walls; although it may be hard to read the meaning is there in plain view

After I completed the abstraction of my chosen stories the quilt making process began. I didn't piece it together like a typical quilt. I decided to create my own way of constructing the quilt as it speaks to me creating my own experience. I wanted to find a physical solution to fit all of my ancestor's stories as well as my own experience into one piece. I began by gathering my materials. I decided to use embroidery mesh as my substrate and acrylic yarn as my mark making tool. I traced my designs on to the mesh to begin each square. Next I braided the different colors of yarn required to fill in the square. I then hand sewed each braid into the shape of the design. Once all the colors were where they needed to be I trimmed the edges and the square was done. Each square took a different amount of time but I averaged out to about three squares a week. It was then time to make the borders. I cut and taped the embroidery mesh into 20 fitted frames for each of the squares. I then braided, sewed, and trimmed with the same technique as the squares. Throughout this process I learned a few techniques. I thankfully learned how to embroider. I had experimented with it for my last senior show of sorts but had refused to touch it since then. I was struggling with translating the amount of detail I initially designed into braids. It was difficult to have it super clean and

detailed with even the smallest braids possible. My mentor, Sara, helped me to realize that I could simply embroider with the yarn to achieve the look I was searching for. I had been experimenting with applique and using buttons and patches on top of my designs to enhance them. But embroidery allowed me to enhance my design while keeping the all yarn look I preferred. Before I began the quilt I performed various tests for how I will tie off the braid, to avoid them coming unraveled. I tried burning, using hair beads, and boiling the ends. I began the quilt by using small rubber hair ties. but quickly realized that the embroidery mesh was rigid enough to act as a board to tie off the braids. I also began the quilt by using white embroidery floss. This added a lot of time to my process. I had to be very careful to not allow the thread to show because it didn't match the yarn. I also had to go back after trimming and tease the braids to cover the white thread. On my fifth or sixth square I realized that if I separate my yarn I have thread, that is an exact color match, to my braids. Making the quilt was definitely a learning process and almost every time I had my weekly mentor meeting I had found a better way to do something or learned more about the materials. I am proud of the finished product and to be able to stand in front of it today. However, most of the work I have done was internal and had to do with the acceptance of who I am and came from and refusal to be one race or the other.

Investigating the lives of my ancestors was exciting and opened my eyes to the nearly infinite amount of stories and perspectives within my own family.

This is something I realized early on however I didn't begin to consider the depth in our differences until my brother began school. We both have the same parents but turned out looking different; It's especially noticeable in our skin tones and curl patterns. As I remember it we often clung to one another in new spaces. We were usually the only two kids of color so stuck together. I thought his experience growing up would mimic mine since we were the same in my eyes. I realized our experiences were very different when he began elementary school. He was getting accused of everything that went wrong in the classroom. I remember my parents constantly getting calls and emails from his teacher. I was really confused how Miles got into so much trouble, he was always relatively reserved. The things he did do he usually got away with since he was so sneaky. It was his fifth grade graduation when it really clicked for me how blatantly racist the school has been and how vastly different our experiences were. The graduation ceremony was over and all the families were meeting their students back in their classrooms. The graduates were all sitting at their desks awaiting class photos. All of the Black and brown children, including my brother, were seated in the very back row towards the corner of the classroom. My family was awestruck at the sight, and were wondering if it had been this way the whole school year. I couldn't help but remember where my seat used to be in the classroom next door; the front row. At that moment I felt guilty and ashamed that I was treated better. I now realize that I am not the one that should feel guilt and I shouldn't be ashamed that I fit better into the mold white supremacy has casted. Our differing experiences have brought us as siblings closer. I think it's been difficult for both of us since our dad passed to figure out who we are and where we stand( racially). Miles was 12 and I was 16 so we were both in the stages of

finding and creating our identity. A huge part of who we are disappeared and It was hard, at least for me, to figure out what I still had “claim to” after his passing. It’s often Miles’s teenage arrogant attitude that snaps me out of that and reminds me I have a claim to whatever I’d like to (within reason of course).

I am thankful for my ancestors and what they have provided me with. This project is about me illustrating my love for both sides of my ancestry regardless of how history has pitted them against each other. All of my work on my ancestry is not only for me but also for my brother, Miles. We may have different experiences but we come from the same people. My goal for this work is to continue to add squares about Miles and me and then pass it down as an heirloom of sorts so our descendants. It is also for people to consider what being bi-racial in the United States is like. And to consider what white supremacist ideologies still exist in a nation that is becoming more mixed. I illustrated my struggle with the push and pull between both of my races with my braids and embraced their differences and histories by sharing their stories in one piece.

Thank you to my mentor Sara for inspiring me to begin braiding nearly 2 years ago and for continuing to push me to make work I am proud of. And thank you to my family for providing me with these stories and allowing me to share them.

Thank you for coming !

Questions?