

Point of Revue (1st ed. - 08.16.06) - pointofrevueCjr

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VAUDEVILLIANS

Production Notes

Point of Revue is to be performed without intermission. It is set in the here and now.

Music recordings from the original production are available; contact Playscripts for details. In addition, sheet music for many of the original songs is at the end of this script.

Acknowledgments

Point of Revue was conceived and commissioned by Jack Reuler, Liz Engelman, and Thomas W. Jones II. It was produced by Mixed Blood Theatre Company (Jack Reuler, Artistic Director), and premiered on March 17, 2006. The cast and crew were as follows:

ENSEMBLE OF NEW AGE

VAUDEVILLIANSAnsa Akyea
Warren C. Bowles
Tonia Jackson
Amy Matthews
Joe Minjares
Thomasina Petrus
Xavier Rice
Jevetta Steele
Austene Van

UNDERSTUDIES Christiana Clark
Ron Collier
Thomasina Petrus

Produced byJack Reuler, Artistic Director
Directed by Thomas W. Jones II
Music composed by J.D. Steele
Musical direction bySanford Moore
Choreography by Colleen McClellan Ueland
Dramaturgy byLiz Engelman

Scenic Designer

and Technical Director Thomas Barrett
Costume Designer Christine Richardson
Lighting and Video Designer Tom Mays
Sound Designer Reid Rejsa
Properties Designer Tracey A. Carlon
Stage Manager Ann K. Terlizzi
Assistant Director Hannah Baines

VAUDEVILLIANS

by Thomas W. Jones II

(In the darkness, the sound of African drums segue into jazz percussions that further segues into hip-hop rhythms and culminates into the sound of a funky heartbeat. A funky heartbeat accelerates in the darkness and culminates in a feverish pitch until the stage explodes in a myriad of lights. A troupe of new age vaudevillians attired in abstract performance gear stand everywhere. A funky underscore begins as VAUDEVILLIANS sing.)

ALL VAUDEVILLIANS.

IT'S THE POINT OF REVUE

TO REVUE WHAT IS NEW

AT THE FLICK OF A QUEUE

FROM THOSE DARKER THAN BLUE, DARKER THAN BLUE

SO THE POINT OF THE NIGHT

IS TO BRING TO THE LIGHT

WHAT'S BEEN SHADED FROM SIGHT

AND YOU KNOW THAT AIN'T RIGHT, YOU KNOW THAT
AIN'T RIGHT

VAUDEVILLIAN 7. IT AIN'T RIGHT, IT AIN'T RIGHT, IT AIN'T
RIGHT

(LEADER OF THE VAUDEVILLIANS pulls VAUDEVILLIAN 7 aside and we see as she aggressively reprimands VAUDEVILLIAN 7. VAUDEVILLIAN 7 sheepishly returns to his place on stage. VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER queues as underscore resumes.)

VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER. Holla, Check one, check two. It's a microphone check. Maestro here we go.

ALL VAUDEVILLIANS.

IT'S A POINT OF REVUE

TO GIVE THOSE THEIR DUE

AND MAYBE YOU ALREADY KNEW

VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER.

AND IF IT'S YOU PLEASE DON'T SUE

ALL VAUDEVILLIANS. A POINT OF REVUE

(Underscore continues with a funky low down bass line.)

VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER. We are players...new age players...
players of a new age.

VAUDEVILLIAN 1. With a gifted rage for the new age.

VAUDEVILLIAN 2. Played on a stage for players.

VAUDEVILLIAN 3. New rage players.

ALL VAUDEVILLIANS. PLAYER. PLAYER.

VAUDEVILLIAN 4. How nice that Candy Rice is a player.

ALL VAUDEVILLIANS. PLAYER. PLAYER.

VAUDEVILLIAN 5. The forlorned Barry Bonds who's feeling so
low.

VAUDEVILLIAN 7. Barry Bonds on the low?

VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER. No.

VAUDEVILLIANS #6 & #8. How low will you go.

ALL VAUDEVILLIANS. PLAYER. PLAYER.

VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER.

IT'S AN AGE HARD TO GAUGE
PLAYED ON STAGE AFTER STAGE
TURNED ON PAGE AFTER PAGE
FOR WE ARE PLAYERS

ALL VAUDEVILLIANS. NEW AGE PLAYERS

VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER.

SO THE POINT OF REVUE
IS TO GLANCE AT THE VIEW
FROM A FAR SIGHTED CREW

ALL VAUDEVILLIANS. A FAR SIGHTED CREW, 00-00-00-00

VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER. IT'S THE POINT OF REVUE

VAUDEVILLIANS.

TO SWING IN THE NEW
SWUNG FROM THE HUE

OF THOSE DARKER THAN BLUE, DARKER THAN BLUE
VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER. AND IF YOU LISTEN TONIGHT
VAUDEVILLIANS. LISTEN
VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER. FROM BEYOND THE FOOTLIGHTS
VAUDEVILLIANS. FROM THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT
 BOTH ENGAGED AND CONTRITE, ENGAGED AND CONTRITE

VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER
 SO THE SOUND THAT YOU HEAR
 A SOUND WE HOLD DEAR
 SOMETIMES PLAYS TO THE FEAR
 RESOLUTE AND SINCERE
 YES THE SOUND THAT YOU HEAR
 THE ONE WE HOLD DEAR
 DANGLES CLOSE TO YOUR EAR
 ARE THE PLAYERS

VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER.
(Ad Lib.)

THE POINT OF REVUE
(Ad Lib.)

THE POINT OF REVUE
 PLAYER PLAYER

VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER. And lights!

(Lights up on a black man sitting center stage with a white dummy made of wood on his lap. Begin: "Wooden You")

VAUDEVILLIANS.
 AH HH.....

VAUDEVILLIANS.
 PLAYER PLAYER
 PLAYER PLAYER
 PLAYER PLAYER
 PLAYER PLAYER

THE POINT OF REVUE
 PLAYER PLAYER
 PLAYER PLAYER
 PLAYER PLAYER
 PLAYER PLAYER
 THE POINT OF REVUE
 PLAYER PLAYER

WOODEN YOU

by Syl Jones

(Curtain opens on BLACK MAN sitting at center stage with a white DUMMY, made of wood, on his lap. The DUMMY wears a farm implements hat, a plaid shirt and sneakers. The MAN is wearing an Izod shirt, Dockers pants and loafers.)

BLACK MAN. Can we talk?

DUMMY. Uh oh, here we go— It's Montel time again!

BLACK MAN. How long we known each other?

DUMMY. A coon's age. No pun intended.

(Canned laugh track.)

BLACK MAN. Stop it. I'm serious.

DUMMY. Look we've been through this before, and I got nothing to say.

BLACK MAN. Clean that wood wax outta your ears and just listen for a change.

DUMMY. *(Sighs.)* I hate Black Male menopause!

BLACK MAN. The black man gets no respect in this country!

DUMMY. *(Rapidly:)* What about Colin Powell, Snoop Dog, Charles Barkley, Tiger Woods?

BLACK MAN. I said shut up and listen!

DUMMY. Oooo K!

(More laughter.)

BLACK MAN. This country was built on the backs of my ancestors. We were used and abused. Our land was stolen, we lived in caves, in the woods, on beaches, slept outdoors with the sun scorching our backs—

DUMMY. All the things people pay good money for at a Club Med!

(Canned laughter.)

BLACK MAN. We were working for people without getting paid, man!

DUMMY. That's called an apprenticeship—

(Canned chuckle.)

BLACK MAN. Our women were raped by the white man—

DUMMY. That's called ladies night!

(Canned chuckle.)

BLACK MAN. They paraded us around in the public square without a stitch of clothing—

DUMMY. That's called Sports Illustrated—the Midnight Edition!

(Canned laughter.)

BLACK MAN. You fixin' to get bitch slapped!

DUMMY. There you go getting violent again! I bet you're on dope, too. Don't cut me, I'm begging you, please—

(Canned laughter.)

BLACK MAN. If you don't stop makin' fun of my people—

DUMMY. I'm just asking you what you got against the United States of America, the greatest country in the world, the country everybody wants to live in, the nation that exports democracy whether you want it or not—the land of opportunity?

BLACK MAN. Opportunity for some!

DUMMY. If you weren't so lazy, it would be opportunity for all!

BLACK MAN. Lazy? Who you callin' lazy, white boy?

DUMMY. You, black boy! Instead of working for a livin', you're sitting here with your hand stuck up my butt like you're Michael Jackson and I'm 8 years old! *(Michael Jackson Sound Cue.)* Trying to get me to say what you think the average white guy might say if he was being honest about race. You call that show business?

(Canned laughter.)

BLACK MAN. Oh, you think this is easy? Making you talk about race?

DUMMY. I can't help it if I'm the strong, silent Scandinavian type!

BLACK MAN. Scandinavian? You're as Anglo as they get!

DUMMY. On my mama's side. My daddy's a Norwegian pine!

BLACK MAN. *(Skeptically.)* Yeah, and my daddy's Bill Cosby!

DUMMY. You and 200 others! *(Bill Cosby Laugh Sound Cue.)* What good does it do to talk when I'm in the down position in an up-down relationship? You control the strings, brother. I'm the slave in this act!

BLACK MAN. You don't know a thing about slavery!

DUMMY. I certainly do. My great-great granddaddy was a plank in the Republican platform of 1860!

(Rim Shot.)

BLACK MAN. Is that a fact?

DUMMY. Yeah, and my grandmama was a Lincoln log!

(Rim shot.)

BLACK MAN. Get the hell outta here!

DUMMY. Listen, I could show you a few things if you would just set me free.

BLACK MAN. But I can't do that, dummy!

DUMMY. Why not?

BLACK MAN. Because you're my primary source of revenue. Without you, I'd have to work a whole lot harder. No, you're *my* dummy. I created you. You belong to me. You understand that? *(Pause.)* Here...open your mouth and let me see your teeth!

(Pause.)

(DUMMY looks at BLACK MAN, then at the audience. After a beat, he starts to sing:)

DUMMY. "When Israel was in Egypt land...let my people go!"

(Laughter.)

BLACK MAN. Now, just a minute—

DUMMY. “Go down, Moses...way down in Egypt land...tell old...Pharoah...!”

(Laughter.)

BLACK MAN. You callin’ me Pharoah after all I’ve done for you? Don’t I feed you, cloth you, polish you up so you shine under these lights?

DUMMY. I told you—I need something a lot stronger than Lemon Pledge to get through this act!

(Laughter.)

BLACK MAN. Are you telling me you want your freedom? That you’d be willing to abandon me after all I’ve done for you?

DUMMY. Don’t think it as abandonment...think of it as me walking out on your ass!

(Laughter.)

BLACK MAN. All right. You want to be free...I’ll set you free...

DUMMY. *(Jubilant:)* You will?

BLACK MAN. Absolutely!

(He removes his hand from the puppet’s back and it collapses to the floor. BLACK MAN waits passively for several beats.)

BLACK MAN. Well...you’re free, dummy. Get up and go!

(Pause.)

BLACK MAN. What’s the matter? Why aren’t you out creating wealth like other Americans?

(Pause as DUMMY says nothin’.)

BLACK MAN. Look at you, lounging around all day doing nothing. Why don’t you get an education? President Bush’s got a “no dummy left behind” program—why don’t you take advantage of that!

(Long pause – then, from the floor—)

DUMMY. *(Sounding blacker:)* This ain't workin' like I expected!

(Laughter.)

BLACK MAN. Oh, so you want a helpin' hand, eh?

DUMMY. Four acres and a mule!

(Laughter.)

BLACK MAN. Why don't you make like Clarence Thomas and pull yourself up by your bootstraps, dummy?

DUMMY. 'Cause I wearin' tennis shoes!

(Laughter.)

BLACK MAN. Ain't that a damn shame! No boots, no straps!

DUMMY. Come on, give a brother a break! You gonna let me die like this?

BLACK MAN. Where's your family? Why don't you call them?

DUMMY. You split up my family. Sold my sister Dolly way down to Tennessee...and you sent my other sister out west!

BLACK MAN. Which sister is that?

DUMMY. You remember...Holly!

BLACK MAN. *(Rolls his eyes:)* Right...

DUMMY. No! Don't pick me up! You done broke my thigh bone as it is.

BLACK MAN. Really? Well, maybe we better do some Reconstruction!

DUMMY. No, stay the hell away from me!

BLACK MAN. While you're down there on the floor, maybe you should search for some relatives who could help your sorry ass out in your time of need.

DUMMY. Now, that's cold!

BLACK MAN. Maybe you got some relations in the audience. Looks like it to me. Why don't you ask them to come up here and help you?

DUMMY. *(Surprised:)* You'd let me do that?

BLACK MAN. Show! I believe in charity. I'll even ask on your behalf... *(hushed tones)* Ladies and gentlemen, you see before you a poor wooden dummy without a family. Won't you help?

(Pause as BLACK MAN pulls a gun out of his pocket and casually dangles it from his hand.)

BLACK MAN. *(Defiantly:)* Come on up here and help this poor dummy out!

DUMMY. What you doin'? Put that gun away!

BLACK MAN. I'm just protectin' my property and my heritage! Doesn't look like we have any compassionate conservatives in the audience! You're on your own now, boy!

(Audience plant tries to come onstage, the BLACK MAN should stop her with this line:)

BLACK MAN. Where you goin'? You wanna end up like him! Sit your skinny ass down!

DUMMY. OK, Ok...I learned my lesson. Forget I even asked about my freedom! Forgive me for actin' a fool. Just...help me up...please. Please! I swear fo' God, I won't give you no more trouble!

(BLACK MAN puts gun away and picks the DUMMY up and puts him back on his lap.

Pause.)

DUMMY. That's what I'm talkin' 'bout! That's humanitarianism!

BLACK MAN. No, that's paternalism. You just don't know the difference.

(The DUMMY suddenly seizes the BLACK MAN by the throat and starts choking him.)

The DUMMY is all over the BLACK MAN, rolling on the floor, until, at last, the dummy's got the gun and is aiming it at the black man's head.)

DUMMY. What you got to say now, black boy? Huh?!

BLACK MAN. *(Tentatively:)* Come on feets...don't fail me now?

(Big laugh and applause.)

(Lights change and the performers are back as they were at the beginning, with the BLACK MAN smiling, the DUMMY sitting on his lap.)

BLACK MAN. That's all we have time for tonight, folks...Until next time ...

DUMMY. *(To the audience:)* He's Woody... *(Points to BLACK MAN:)*

BLACK MAN. And he's...YOU! *(Points to the audience.)*

DUMMY. Together, that makes us...

BLACK MAN & DUMMY. Wooden You!

(Black Out.)

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

by Warren C. Bowles

(City bus. STEVE, Black, in his late 20s, sits in a window seat reading August Wilson's Fences. A backpack sits on the seat to his left. JUANITA LEE, Black, mid to late 20s, boards the bus. She is dressed in a blue or green uniform or scrubs. She stands a moment looking for a seat. The bus is obviously crowded. Since there are no seats available she stands by Steve's. She notices that he neither offers her the vacant seat nor does he really seem to notice her. He reads a line then closes his eyes and mumbles the line under his breath. He is trying to learn lines.)

JUANITA LEE. Honey, you o.k.?

STEVE. Huh?

JUANITA LEE. I heard a people movin' their lips when they read but look like you really "soundin' *everything* out."

STEVE. Yeah.

JUANITA LEE. Sorry. It was a joke. *(A beat.)* Honey, you gonna let me sit down?

(She glances at the seat beside STEVE and after a quick moment he notices and moves his backpack. She sits.)

(STEVE smiles politely.)

JUANITA LEE. Whatcha readin'?

STEVE. This? It's a play actually. *Fences?* *(No response from JUANITA LEE.)* By August Wilson?

JUANITA LEE. Oh? Any good?

STEVE. Uh, yeah. It's one of the greatest plays of the twentieth century, if not of all time.

JUANITA LEE. Oh. You go the U?

STEVE. No. Actually I'm headed over to the South side. I'm headed over to The Mashuhuri. See, I'm not just *reading* the play I'm working on my lines. I'm understudying Gabe and Bono. *(No response)*

from JUANITA LEE.) That's what I do. (*No response from* JUANITA LEE.) I'm a professional actor.

JUANITA LEE. For real?

STEVE. Yeah.

JUANITA LEE. You sing?

STEVE. (*Sings, doing his best Luther Vandross, perhaps over doing it a bit on the final "Dove."*)

There's a Rose
In a fisted Glove
and the eagle flies
with the dove...

JUANITA LEE. (*He can sing:*) Hunh. ...What movies you in?

STEVE. No. I'm a local actor. On the stage. Theater.

JUANITA LEE. I been to plays. In high school they took a bunch of us to that big theater downtown.

STEVE. That's The Rep.

JUANITA LEE. They told us it was gonna be a play about some sistas. (*She laughs.*) Wasn't nothin' but White people sittin' around, talkin' in all that Shakespeare talk about how they need to get off the farm and get to Moscow or somethin'. (*She laughs again.*) I kinda liked it though. Them big cushy seats. Theater, unh, that's some of the best sleep you can get. (*She starts digging her CD Walkman out of her bag.*)

STEVE. Oh. Well I'm working over at The Mashuhuri. (*No response from* JUANITA LEE.) It's one of *the* preeminent Black theaters in the United States. Black people here are really lucky to have such a preeminent Black theater in our community. (*No response from* JUANITA LEE.) It's my second time working there. Last spring I did *Holding Hands In The Park*. Marsha promised me she'd find something for me in *Fences* if I would do *Holding Hands*. So...

JUANITA LEE. (*Getting ready to listen to a cd but obviously surprised that she recognizes the title.*) I know about that play.

STEVE. Yeah?

JUANITA LEE. A deacon at my church was talking about it. He said it was about a couple a' faggots. Is that the one?

STEVE. Is that all he saw? But there was a lot more to the play than just that. Why do people have to reduce everything to stereotypes, that are only about what they *want* to see, not necessarily about what is actually there. How you deal with that person. An old, ignorant, backwater, bigoted...

JUANITA LEE. How do you know? You don't know that! You don't know Deacon Sims! *(She turns on the cd.)*

STEVE. Uh, no. You're right. I'm sorry. And I'm not trying to defend homosexuality. I mean, I'm not gay myself. Uh, obviously. There *are* gay, Black men. So there's nothing wrong with seeing them on stage. I mean, jeez, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, uh, *(Searching. Trying to remember Roscoe Lee Browne's name:)* uh, Billy Dee Williams. *(A beat. JUANITA is lost in her music.)* I mean, I'm just sensitive about the images of Black men that we do and don't see on the stage. You know what I'm saying?

JUANITA LEE. *(Singing softly:)* B-A-B-Y

STEVE. In grad school I was so thrilled when I was cast as Aaron in *Titus*.

If one good deed in all my life I did,
I do repent it from my very soul.

Even though I had to audition to even get in the program at Prairie View, 'cause now I was doing "Shakespeare" at "the big university" I thought I had arrived.

JUANITA LEE. *(Singing softly:)* ...it's like a badge of honor.

STEVE. I was playing a White man's image of a Black man.

JUANITA LEE. *(Singing softly:)* I see ya workin' ya job
I see ya goin' to school

STEVE. From the 16th century.

JUANITA LEE. *(Singing softly:)* And even though ya fed up
With makin' beds up

STEVE. “A villainous Moor, with a *fiend-like face*.” Can you believe that?

JUANITA LEE. *(Singing softly:) B-A-B-Y*

STEVE. *(He’s on a roll now.)* White people always control the images. It’s like The Rep. It’s great they did *Top Dog* and *In The Blood* but does Suzan-Lori Parks really *need* The Public or The Rep? Is she a *great* playwright because she’s produced at The Rep or does The Rep do her plays *because* she’s a great playwright. Or do they think of her as just the best of the current crop of Black playwrights, you know, “the best of the rest?” How come hers are the images of Black people we need to see? You know?

Course I’d love to get that Rep salary for a while.

JUANITA LEE. *(Singing softly:) ...in the mail*

STEVE. And tell me. Why do they always cast out of New York? I could of played the shit out of Booth.

JUANITA LEE. *(Singing softly:) Sayin to yourself, “This here ain’t fair”*

STEVE. I think I’m the only actor in town can’t get cast at the fuckin’ Rep.

JUANITA LEE. *(Singing softly:) What don’t kill you can only make you stronger*

STEVE. I’m just glad I can sing a little. I mean, you look around nowadays there’s so many theaters doing *Mahalia*, *Somebody Say Amen*, *Steal Away*, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*. We’re sliding back to giving the White audiences only what they want – Black folks singing and dancing and “praisin’ they Jesus.”

JUANITA LEE. *(Singing softly:) (She hears this last bit as she reaches across him to pull the “Stop Request” cord.) B-A-B-Y*

STEVE. Oh, you’re getting off at the U. I get the uniform now. You work in housekeeping at the hospital or somewhere else on campus?

JUANITA LEE. *(Singing softly:) I know we can make it if we dream (Taking off her headphone and putting her Walkman away.)* What did you say? What did you just ask me?

STEVE. The uniform. You work in housekeeping somewhere on campus?

JUANITA LEE. *(The bus stops. She is getting up to leave.)* Actually I'm a second-year Rho Chi Fellow in the Clinical and Experimental Pharmacology program. I'll tell you what, it's been real nice talking to you. Good luck to you and your preeminent little play. See ya.

(She exits. STEVE is lost for a moment then returns to studying his script. ANGELA, White, early 20s, a bundle of energy enters. She carries a large handbag and a book bag. She's humming along to the music she's listening to on her iPod. Before she can even look to see what seats are open she recognizes STEVE.)

ANGELA. Oh, my god! You're Steve Lewis aren't you?

STEVE. I...

ANGELA. Oh, my god! I saw you last spring in *Holding Hands In The Park* over at The Mashuhuri. What a daring, powerful piece! It is so wonderful to see African American theaters taking such risks and to see audiences supporting it. God, I just *love* The Mashuhuri. It has to be *the* most important African American theater in the nation.

STEVE. Preeminent...

ANGELA. We're so lucky to have that theater in our community. May I? *(Sitting before he can even respond.)* Oh, my god, *Fences!* Are you going to be in that? I didn't see the last one but I did see it the first time The Mashuhuri did it. Were you in that one? I think *Fences* may just be the greatest American play of all time. God, African American playwrights are the *lifeblood* of the American theater. August Wilson, Suzan-Lori Parks, uh, *(Searching. Trying to remember Jeff Stetson's name:)* uh, you know, Mel Brooks. *(She removes the ear buds and starts putting her iPod away.)* I just loved you in *Waiting For Godot* and, of course, *The Temptations Revue* over at the Avenue A Theater. God, that was great! My name's Angela.

STEVE. *(He starts putting his script in his backpack. He sings, lightly but not "knowingly" or with any sense of irony.)*

ALL SING. There's a Rose
In a fisted Glove
and the eagle flies
with the dove
and if you can't be
with the one you love, honey
love the one you're with
love the one you're with

Dodo Dodo Dodo Dodo
Dodo Dodo Dodo Dodo

Dododo
Dododo

INTERPRETATION OF BEING

by Kirsten Greenidge

(ALISHA stands.)

ALISHA. The death. Of Cleopatra.

(ALISHA crosses to SHIRLEY, who stands examining a canvas on an easel. ALISHA picks up a paint brush.)

SHIRLEY. *(Skeptical.)* I don't know.

ALISHA. You don't like it?

SHIRLEY. I just think—

ALISHA. I like it.

SHIRLEY. I just think. Well. I don't know.

ALISHA. It's 'cause I was thinking of like nature, right, and how we all got it running through us, right, and it connects us to what came before and what's coming after, which I think is like this, like this great *idea*, right, like, like, like, that way back, way back we're *connected*.

SHIRLEY. Connected...

ALISHA. —to people from way back. Like even the Greats, right, and so they're not gone, right, like all the greats—the artists, the inventors, the *rulers*, right— are still running through us, you know, so they're still beating in us, cause it's nature: in us: that, see, connects us, so when we're talking to each other we're really, kind of, talking to them, the greats, the people that came before from way back, so the message is you got to be careful, how you talk to people cause you got to talk in a way, behave in a way, that respects those greats, that doesn't, like, stifle, right, stifle those greats...

SHIRLEY. What's that in the corner?

(ALISHA peeks into the canvas.)

ALISHA. A leaf.

SHIRLEY. You sure?

ALISHA. I'm the one who made it, didn't I?

SHIRLEY. I don't know.

ALISHA. 'Cause it's about, like, about nature: the painting's about nature.

SHIRLEY. I guess.

ALISHA. I read about these leaves—

SHIRLEY. It's just—

ALISHA. These leaves called lotus leaves—

SHIRLEY. I mean it doesn't—

ALISHA. And I got to thinking maybe they'd make a good painting, right—

SHIRLEY. But it doesn't really *look* like a tree, really. I'm not into that fancy art that no one knows what it's supposed to be. If it's a tree, make a tree. Why do you need to trick people?

ALISHA. I didn't *make* a tree 'cause it's *not* a tree.

SHIRLEY. You just said it was a tree.

ALISHA. It's a leaf.

SHIRLEY. You sure?

ALISHA. A lotus leaf.

SHIRLEY. This whole thing needs some *color*.

ALISHA. Well it's my *idea* of a lotus leaf, that's why it's orange—

SHIRLEY. No, like, you know “col-*or*”.

(Pause.)

(SHIRLEY looks at ALISHA.)

(ALISHA looks at the canvas.)

SHIRLEY. I mean, 'cause, you know, I'm all for this painting thing, right, like, that's what school, whatever: college, is for, so when you started this painting thing I was like, cool, right, like that first thing

you did, that first thing you did was like, well, it didn't have any orange leaves in it, right. I mean, it had some color up in it.

ALISHA. This *has* color. It's *orange*.

SHIRLEY. No, like, *color*, like *folks*, like when you first got into this painting thing, right, you was painting folks, like for the people, right, and, like, this leaf thing, it's just not. It's not like black, you know. It's just.

(She looks at the canvas.)

(ALISHA looks at SHIRLEY.)

If you gonna do this art thing you got a responsibility. People see this they think we ain't got nothing else to think about except leaves and interpreting stuff, when that ain't the truth of us at all. We still in the *struggle*, girl, you can't start painting about orange leaves that don't even exist when we still in the *struggle*. What you doin' aint' got no *truth*.

(SHIRLEY looks at ALISHA.)

(SHIRLEY gently but firmly takes the paint brush, dips it in a color at the easel, and paints on the canvas.)

SHIRLEY. See now that's better: no more of that orange stuff: that's *truth*.

(ALISHA places the brush back at the bottom of the canvas, as it was before.)

(She crosses to wear she was before.)

(She takes out a cigarette.)

(ALISHA lights the cigarette.)

(Inhales.)

(Exhales.)

ALISHA. The Death. Of Cleopatra.

AFTER PARTY

by Lynn Nottage

AN OVERHEARD: Confession #1

(BET Awards after party. Outside Bathroom. Music pumps upbeat, hard driving, and contemporary. LYDIA, an African American WOMAN dressed for a party thumps on the door.)

LYDIA. Hel-lo. There are like people out he-re.

(JONELLE, a beauty decked out in deluxe designer fashion, stumbles onto stage dancing as if her life depended on it. Her silver stilettos dangle between her fingers, and her eyes are alcohol-induced slits.)

JONELLE. This...is...the...jam!

(The music shifts to something more subdued.)

JONELLE. That was my song! That was *my* song! I ain't braggin', but he was the first artist my husband signed to the label. 1.5 million records, and baby we moved from the hood to the hill so fast nobody even knew we was gone for two weeks.

LYDIA. I hear that.

JONELLE. This the line for the *toilette*?

LYDIA. Yeah.

JONELLE. Awright, then I have arrived. Is this a party or what?

LYDIA. It's cool.

JONELLE. Folks turned out, didn't that?

LYDIA. Yup!

JONELLE. The award show was a drag, but this party// is off the hook.

LYDIA. Wait a minute, you're//

JONELLE. //Ummhmm

LYDIA. //Wife.

JONELLE. (*Bored:*) //Jonelle. People forget, I have a name.

LYDIA. Wow. Lydia. I'm no one...no, I mean...I'm a friend of one of the...it's not important. Cool...I know it's not hip-hop parlance...but cool.

(They bob uncomfortably to the music for a moment.)

I like your shoes.

JONELLE. (*Feigned modesty:*) Prada.

(JONELLE takes a joint from her bra.)

You gotta light?

(LYDIA, surprised, digs into her purse and hands JONELLE a lighter.)

Hey, you party?

LYDIA. I...I—

(Before she can answer JONELLE shoves the joint into her hand. LYDIA looks about guiltily. JONELLE wickedly giggles.)

JONELLE. Go on, 'fore I change my mind. Ain't nobody in here care.

(LYDIA takes a tentative hit, coughing. In turn, JONELLE draws long and hard on the joint, releasing a cloud of smoke.)

Can I tell you something, from one bitch to another? I mean that affectionately. I don't know you, you don't know me. But let's be real, most the women in here are jealous bitches, awright, trying to get at my man. Hating on my style, want what I got.

(JONELLE shows off her sparkling accoutrement with childlike glee.)

I ain't got time for it. They's pathetic. And they think they know me, 'cause they read a few lies in the Source magazine. So what? So the fuck what? I know what they're saying. I like to party. I do...but I don't do it that often. I got two kids, awright, and a husband on the road all the muthafucking time. You *know* what I mean? And sometimes I need to get my funk on.

LYDIA. Absolutely. That's why my kids are home with the baby-sitter.

(The women share a moment of mutual understanding.)

JONELLE. *(Boastfully:)* I found a sister. You understand? I have two beautiful children, and I'm a good mom. But you know it's hard sometimes to be that person. For real. All them damn questions they ask, why is the sky blue? Where do babies come from? Where does God live? Why can't we see 'em?

(A moment. Sincerely—)

Why is the sky blue?

LYDIA. I think it has something to do with the atmosphere—

JONELLE. I don't really give a fuck, but you know what I'm saying.

(LYDIA chuckles to herself.)

Dag, why is this bitch taking so long? C'mon! Whatcha doing in there?

LYDIA. I think she's sick.

JONELLE. No! Yuck. I wish you hadn't told me. There's somethin' going around. I had to keep my three kids home from school last week. I nearly lost my mind.

(A moment.)

LYDIA. I thought you said you had two children.

JONELLE. Did I? I have three. But I guess I don't really count the third. It's not really my child.

LYDIA. It's his?

JONELLE. No.

(A moment. Thinking.)

Yes.

(JONELLE relights the joint.)

It's my child. I don't know why I said no. But, I guess I don't really think of it that way. I gave it up when she was an infant. She was raised by my mother-in-law. But my mother in law died in June.

LYDIA. I'm sorry.

JONELLE. Not as sorry as I am...The child has down syndrome.

LYDIA. Oh.

JONELLE. That's why I don't like to say nothing to people. "Oh," is the response. I also get, "I'm sorry" or "it must be hard."

LYDIA. I didn't mean—

JONELLE. I was twenty-five, shit like this is not supposed to happen right? Someone who looks like me is supposed to have a perfect baby. Twins...I couldn't abort one with out risking both. And when the girls were born, both were healthy, but one was different. Yup. So different, I couldn't even bring myself to look at her. I told my husband "I ain't strong enough to raise a child with a disability." Not me. I told 'em 'it's hard enough being a black child in this world, but a black child who looks she do ain't got a chance.'" Her life is gonna be hell I told him. I'm right. I wanted to sign the papers that day, it's only natural...give her to somebody, anybody who would give her love. My husband said no. Can you believe that? No. He didn't even think about how I felt. You know, our community don't always embrace difference. But he loved that little girl from the moment he held her in his arms, this man, this powerful record producer who spends his day marketing perfection to the world.

LYDIA. What happened to the child?

JONELLE. No, she wasn't gonna come home with me. I was very clear with him. But he's got a hard head, bullish. He begged his mother to take her. Which she did, gladly. My husband, God bless him, went to see that child every chance he had, holidays, weekends, summers. But I refused. I couldn't do it. It wasn't my choice. I had a really hard childhood, and when I met my husband, I thought life is gonna be easier, better, I'll see what's on the other side. I don't want no more obstacles. And then...When I saw her in the hospital her small pinched face...I had to...Twelve years now. I had another

child...I pretended not to notice anything was different. It was all good. I did my thing, went to work, you know how it is. And then this Spring my mother-in-law ignored a sharp pain in her abdomen, wouldn't see a doctor and by June she was dead. And my husband said nothing, he moved the child into her twin's bedroom. Even though he knew how I felt. No discussion. Everyone was happy, but me.

(LYDIA is shocked by what she's hearing.)

You think I'm a monster. Why is this crazy bitch telling me all of this?

LYDIA. She's your child, you must feel something.

JONELLE. I feel everything. I feel the way people look at me on the street when I'm walking with her, and I'm not one to be pitied. I feel the struggle she's gonna have when as she matures into black woman with few options. I feel my husband's contempt, my families love for this little broken girl. You wanna know the truth? She is a beautiful simple child, loving beyond reason. Which isn't fair. But I still can't bring myself to touch her. My husband dresses her, combs her hair for school and waits with her for the school bus when he can. This busy important man. Because I won't. I can't. I can't. I don't know why I can't. And the worst of it, is that I actually feel jealous of this child because she gets so much of my husband's attention. There is nothing in this world he wouldn't do for her. There is nothing she can do to diminish his love.

(A moment.)

LYDIA. That's a lot to carry. Maybe you should talk to someone about this, this is—

JONELLE. I'm talking to you! I'm sorry. You don't know me, I don't know you. But you just seem...You know these parties are full of beautiful black people who won't look at each other. Folks'll throw you a moment, because they think they can get something from you. But I think this is the first conversation I've ever had at one of these things. Too much fucking information. I'm not gonna get into this poor me bull shit. Life is drag, it could be worse.

(A moment.)

LYDIA. (*Genuinely:*) Are you all right? What is your daughter's name?

JONELLE. (*Warmly:*) Carmen. You know, sometimes at night she'll give me a hug, so warm and free of judgment that I want to die. I don't deserve to be her mother. I am not strong enough to protect her from even my own resentment. Everyday time I see her, I am reminded of how horrible a person I am. But, I'm not really. Really, I'm not. Am I?

LYDIA. I don't know.

JONELLE. Fair enough. Fair enough.

(JONELLE smiles. Another song plays.)

But, I am.

(JONELLE bursts into tears. LYDIA spontaneously embraces JONELLE.)

Don't tell anyone. There are a lot of jealous bitches out there, hating on my style. Think they want what I got.

(A WOMAN stumbles out of the bathroom. She sees JONELLE.)

WOMAN. Oh my God, you're what's his name's wife. You're—

JONELLE. Jonelle, but people forget I have a name.

(Blackout.)

AT SUNDAY DINNER

by Kirsten Greenidge

Time

Present.

(ALISHA stands, hip jutted out, lit cigarette in hand, smoking.)

(Elsewhere, CATHERINE sits at a dressing table, back straight, staring straight ahead. She removes a necklace, then one earring, then looks straight ahead. She hangs her head.)

(ALISHA exhales a ring of smoke.)

ALISHA. My Aunt Catherine's got this piano.

(VINCENT enters.)

(CATHERINE'S head bolts up.)

CATHERINE. Asleep?

VINCENT. Finally.

CATHERINE. Good.

(CATHERINE smiles, not warmly, straight ahead.)

ALISHA. A Steinway.

VINCENT. He'd go down much easier if that school—

CATHERINE. Don't start—

VINCENT. That school doesn't understand that—

CATHERINE. Please—

VINCENT. —that he's a boy. The real kind; the old fashioned kind; the kind who should be outside climbing, running, doing boy kinds of things, not cooped up in some room expressing his feelings with yarn and glue.

CATHERINE. I've made up my mind.

(CATHERINE looks straight ahead, into her mirror.)

(VINCENT looks into the mirror at CATHERINE.)

ALISHA. When we were little, at Sunday dinner, we were allowed to touch it.

VINCENT. We should think before we—

CATHERINE. No.

VINCENT. Talk before we—

CATHERINE. No.

VINCENT. Please.

(CATHERINE removes her other earring, looks ahead into the mirror.)

(VINCENT looks into the mirror at CATHERINE.)

ALISHA. When we were little, after church at Sunday dinner, we used to play with it.

VINCENT. *Please.*

CATHERINE. Stop.

VINCENT. It's not a little thing, you're asking.

CATHERINE. I'm not asking. I said I've made up my mind.

(CATHERINE removes a bracelet, places it on the dresser.)

ALISHA. Not the music kind of play, though. Not yet. We'd...see: when you opened the lid, since it had this huge, shiny lid we used to like to open it, prop it, so we could look inside, and when you opened the lid you could see the strings. One of us would push down the keys and the rest of us would stand on tip-toe, right, our fingers curled over the rim of the side of the piano, right, and we'd watch those strings, we'd watch those little hammer things pound on those strings.

VINCENT. What I think we oughta do is try that Saint Joseph's.

CATHERINE. No more schools.

ALISHA. My Aunt Catherine didn't mind it. Or. After she came around with the washcloth she didn't mind it. She used to check and double check our hands so we wouldn't mark up that Steinway. All our little pairs of hands and she used to double check each and every one. It was a family joke, for a little while: Aunt Catherine chasing us around with that washcloth.

VINCENT. One week with those nuns and he'll be right on track. Those nuns know how to deal with kids like him, with boys—

CATHERINE. You're making this harder than it has to be.

ALISHA. But there was one Sunday, my Aunt's little boy had only been with us a year by then, and he, my Aunt Catherine's little boy, decided he'd have a joke on her. After dinner Aunt Catherine came around with her washcloth, right, and my, um, I guess you'd call him my cousin, he got that look in his eye, that look that says "watch out, here I come", and Aunt Catherine's coming toward him with her washcloth, I remember it had little roses at the bottom, little pink roses, and my, um, cousin, just took off. And Aunt Catherine's chasing him, trying to wipe at his hands, cause that Steinway's real special to her, that Steinway was the first thing she bought when she and my uncle, you know, started having money, before they adopted my cousin, right. And Aunt Catherine's all out of breath, she's using this high voice telling him to come to Mommy, to come get his hands clean so he can play with the piano like a good boy. You know that high voice moms use when their kid's running around like the devil. Just underneath the voice you can hear this tightness. Just underneath the voice you can hear the sound of someone who's about to break.

VINCENT. He's our son—

(*CATHERINE stands.*)

CATHERINE. I'm going to bed.

VINCENT. We can't—

ALISHA. And by now he's all worked up. Aunt Catherine's out of breathe. Her hair's come loose. She's bent over, panting, the washcloth on her thigh, making a wet mark on the skirt of her dress. Her head's down, as if she's resting for the next round. And that's when

he springs up into the open mouth of the Steinway, like a mouse into a hole.

CATHERINE. It'd be cruel to do it any other way—

ALISHA. We all scramble to the piano, Aunt Catherine pushing her way through cousins, and sisters, and uncles.

CATHERINE. It'd be cruel to let this go on longer than it should.

ALISHA. We all push in to see.

VINCENT. With the right doctors, the right medicine—

ALISHA. We all push in to watch as he spreads the remains of our Sunday dinner—mashed potatoes, candied yams, the ham gravy that's always just a little bit too sweet—

CATHERINE. This is our home, Vincent, not some charity ward—

VINCENT. Don't talk like that, now—

ALISHA. —all slide across the strings of my Aunt Catherine's Steinway piano.

CATHERINE. He's just not our kind of people.

ALISHA. Every once in a while, even now, after church on Sunday dinners, even though it's been a couple of years, even though we've grown too old for the washcloth, when one of us is playing, really playing, now that we've had our lessons, every once in a while one of our fingers will hit a key, and the note it's supposed to create gets stuck, sticks a little, before it comes out, just a little flat. When that happens, I always look over at my Aunt Catherine, but she doesn't move an inch.

DOWN LOW

A Little Ditty Written by Robert O'Hara

(Sung BRIGHTLY to a tune that sounds a lot like that old favorite, SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT:)

MAN IN A SUIT.

DOWN LOW

I CARRY IT

I'M GONNA TELL YOU HOW IT GOES

DOWN LOW

I CARRY IT

COMIN' FORTH TO PUT ON A SHOW

I WENT TO WORK AND WHAT DID THEY SEE

CHORUS. COMING FORTH TO CARRY ME HOME

MAN IN A SUIT. ANOTHER C.E.O. IN ME

CHORUS. COMING FORTH TO CARRY ME HOME

MAN IN A SUIT. IN MY OFFICE WAS MY WIFEY

CHORUS. COMING FORTH TO CARRY ME HOME

**MAN IN A SUIT. SITTING NEXT TO MY HOMEY WITH RESULT
FROM TEST FOR HIV**

3 MEN.

DOWN LOW I CARRY IT, THAT'S JUST HOW THE STORY GOES

DOWN LOW I CARRY IT COMIN' FORTH TO PUT ON A SHOW

MAN IN SPORTS OUTFIT.

DOWN LOW I CARRY IT

THOUGH ITS PROBABLY NOT THAT DEEP DOWN LOW

I CARRY IT

ON THE COURT IS WHERE I CAN TRULY BE. I WON THE MVP
AND MY MAN WAS THERE TO SEE.

BUT HE COULDN'T SIT WITH FAMILY.

NO ONE HAD A CLUE UNTIL I BLEW A KISS TO "BOO"

AND NOW ALL THE PAPERS SCREAM WITH GLEE

MEN IN A SUIT AND SPORTS OUTFIT.

DOWN LOW WE CARRY IT. AND WE'RE GONNA SING IT
HOW IT GOES DOWN LOW
THAT HOW WE LOVE
NOT TO BE CALLED OUT, HOPEFULLY.

ARTIST.

UP HIGH I CARRY IT
I'M GONNA TELL YOU HOW IT GOES
UP HIGH I CARRY IT
AND I DON'T GIVE A DAMN IF IT SHOWS.
I WENT TO THE CONCERT AND I SANG GLORIOUSLY.
AND THESE TWO WERE THERE ON THE DOWN LOW.
I SANG UP HIGH AND THEY JUMPED TO THEIR FEET
THEN I STEP DOWN AND SAID "HELLO"

(They all greet and say "hello.")

ARTIST.

UP HIGH.

SUIT, SPORT MEN.

DOWN LOW.

ALL 3 MEN.

WE CARRY IT. AND WE'RE GONNA TELL YOU HOW IT GOES.

ARTIST.

UP HIGH.

SUIT, SPORT MEN.

DOWN LOW!!!

ALL 3 MEN.

WE CARRY IT. COMIN' FORTH TO PUT ON A SHOW.

ARTIST.

NOW YOU SEE I'M OUT.

MAN IN A SUIT.

AND I'M OUTSOURCING

MAN IN SPORTS OUTFIT.

WELL THE ONLY THING OUT ABOUT ME—

ARTIST AND MAN IN SUIT.
IS HIS OUT-FIT.

MAN IN SPORTS OUTFIT.
WITH MY M.V.P.

MAN IN A SUIT.
AND MY P.H.D.

ARTIST.
DON'T FORGET THE S.T.D.

MEN IN SUIT AND SPORTS OUTFIT. (*Whisper:*)
SHHH—
KEEP IT ON THE D.L.

ARTIST & CHORUS. (*Preaching:*) Well Oprah talked about it. And
the reverend preached about it. But the choir boys sat back
quiet-ly.

MAN IN A SUIT. (*EBONICS:*) Cuz it ain't nobody's bizness

MAN IN SPORTS OUTFIT. (*EBONICS:*) Where I choose to do my
bizness

ARTIST.
AND THAT'S WHERE THE TROUBLE BE, THAT'S WHERE THE
TROUBLE BE, THAT'S WHERE THE TROUBLE BE.

ARTIST.
DOWN LOW

CHORUS. DOWN LOW

SUIT, SPORT MEN.
WE CARRY IT.

ARTIST.
DOWN LOW

CHORUS. DOWN LOW

SUIT, SPORT MEN.
THEY CARRY IT.

ARTIST.
DOWN LOW

CHORUS. DOWN LOW

SUIT, SPORT MEN.

YOU CARRY IT.

CHORUS. DOWN LOW

ARTIST. (*SPOKEN. FINAL.*)

NOW LETS STOP THIS SHIT!!

CHORUS. (*Harmony:*)

H.

I.

V.

DUES

by Dwight Hobbes

Time

Present.

Place

Editorial office at a daily newspaper.

(The Gazette. End of the day. Jorge is at his desk sleeves rolled, looking over a contract. Phone rings. He looks at the screen on the telephone.

(Lifts receiver.)

JORGE. Hi, Izma. ...Kevin here?

(Reflects.)

Send him in.

(Knock on door.)

It's open.

KEVIN. *(Entering:)* Jorge, yo'.

JORGE. What's up?

KEVIN. Y' said come see you. I'm here.

JORGE. Yeah, so you are. Have a seat.

(KEVIN sits.)

Here it is, sweet and plain. Good luck on your next assignment, wherever it is. 'Cause it won't be here.

KEVIN. ...Get out.

JORGE. I shit thee not.

KEVIN. Why?

JORGE. 'Cause you messed up is why.

KEVIN. Don't tell me. The suits are on your case again about me being outspoken.

JORGE. Bah. They been on me about you since I gave you the beat. Hell, they handed me my head went I suggested putting you on staff. It's beyond that, now.

KEVIN. Man, what did I do?

JORGE. The review of that play at The Theatre Institute.

KEVIN. What? I nailed 'em dead to rights. How they gon' do "To Kill A Mockingbird" and call that lynched nigger a tribute to Black History Month? "It's a typical example just what I said it was. How'd I put it? Oh, yeah. "another lily-white, luxury venue pretending to pay respect, raking in that multi-culti funding dollar." I backed up every word.

JORGE. That's not the—.

KEVIN. The hell you mean, that's not the point?!

JORGE. Mi amigo. You wanna take some of that bass out of voice?

KEVIN. (*Modifies his tone:*) ...How iss not the point?

JORGE. As many enemies as you've apparently gone out of your way to make, you ask me a question dumb as that. The name Vanessa Watkins ring a bell?

KEVIN. Sure. She was in "Mockingbird." Couldn't act wet if she fell in a lake. And that's pretty much how I put it in the review. Backed that up, too. So?

JORGE. So, you had dealings with her before I gave you the assignment, yes?

KEVIN. We both ushered at the Downtown Theatre Group. She ain't there anymore. I repeat: so?

JORGE. I'll give you "so" you dimwit. While she was there, she made a complaint and the supervisor called you on the carpet, right?

KEVIN. Yeah.

JORGE. Well, Watkins is claiming your comments about her acting actually are payback for that incident.

KEVIN. She's full of—

JORGE. Why didn't you tell me one of the actors you'd be critiquing had accused you of sexual harassment?

KEVIN. 'Cause, man, there wasn't nothing to it. She's a nutjob who just has to get attention. In fact, she just lost an acting job for that very thing. Harassing the artistic director over at, uh, whatchacallit. Ringin' the man at home, tryin' to slide up on him in rehearsal. Ask anybody over there.

JORGE. None of that has to do with anything. If you harassed her or not, if she's crazy or not. There was a conflict of interest. Which you should've told me about.

KEVIN. Conflict of interest, my b'hine. I didn't pan her because she filed a false complaint. I panned her because she can't act worth a damn. Hell, Pat Shore was in the same show. I wouldn't piss on her to put out a fire, but she did a fine job. And I said so. I'm enough of a pro not to let personal pettiness decide what I write.

JORGE. Yeah, sure: I can see the little halo. Look, I don't care what you said about Pat Shore. Watkins is the one who ran crying to the St. Paul Theatre Institute artistic director. According to him, literally in tears. Added to which, Don Whatshisface has never particularly liked you.

KEVIN. What he doesn't like is the fact that I call him on his pretentious, lily-white bullshit.

JORGE. You should have excused yourself from the assignment.

KEVIN. Wait. I'm supposed to miss a paycheck because she's a moron?

JORGE. I don't get where you get off at calling anybody a moron. You didn't even give me a heads-up. No indication at all that there might be some static—from one of the most influential producers in town. Mm-mn, my man, you don't get to call anyone "moron."

'Cause, you got that paycheck alright. But you won't be getting anymore from The Gazette.

KEVIN. Come on. You're gonna be a uptight asshole—

JORGE. What'd I just tell you about name calling?

KEVIN. You gon' let him tell you how to do your job.

JORGE. Hey, this time it's out of my hands. Not even my decision to make, homes. Shit, I might be walking out the door right along with you. If they weren't afraid to fire two minorities at once. None of the people I answer to liked the idea of my giving you the beat in the first place. I don't think I've really had a minute's peace this past year without hearing from somebody you pissed off. Now, you've finally given a lot of people who can't stand your guts—both here at the paper and all over the rest of town—a big reason to smile.

KEVIN. Don't you think your bosses are overreacting? I mean, they could just suspend me.

JORGE. I know they're overreacting. For that matter, they know they're overreacting. And don't give a shit. Because they finally got rid of you on grounds where, for once, you can't go shootin' your mouth off about racism.

KEVIN. Fuck.

JORGE. Yeah, in a nutshell. Can I tell you what pisses me off?

KEVIN. What pisses you off?

JORGE. You fucking knew better. I know you knew better, because you're not totally stupid. Just dumb enough to go ahead and do it anyway. The more you stick your neck out the better you have to cover your ass. It's just basic common sense.

(Unlocks desk drawer. Takes out bottle of Jack Daniels.)

Ah, what's done is done.

(Gestures toward shelf.)

KEVIN. *(Gets mugs from shelf.)* Easy for you to say.

JORGE. Yo', my good man, don't bitch up on me.

(Pours.)

This just could teach you a good lesson the hard way: you can't afford to make but so many mistakes. And no dumb ones.

(Raising mug.)

Salud.

JORGE. You do see and accept that you fucked up? 'Cause, actually, I haven't heard you cop to it. So,—?

KEVIN. Yes. I fucked up. Mud n' yer eye.

JORGE. See? You're a man of honor and integrity. Now, sign this, finish your drink and then get out my office. I wanna go home and chase my wife around the couch.

KEVIN. What's this, a contract?

JORGE. Very good.

KEVIN. To do a lead feature.

JORGE. It's dated last week. Anyone asks, this was already in the works.

KEVIN. Cool, man, thanks. Uh...a lead feature on what?

JORGE. You'll think of something.

KEVIN. Oh, shit. You're giving me my back to just do my thing.

JORGE. No holds barred.

KEVIN. Way to hook me up.

JORGE. Yeah, right. Listen, there's this guy, one of those holdover hippies, starting up a counter culture weekly. You'd be a perfect fit as the "angry black columnist."

KEVIN. Long as the check don't bounce.

JORGE. *(Scribbles on a note pad.)* Here's the guy's name and phone number. I spoke to him. You want the gig, it's yours. Pays chicken feed, but it is regular.

KEVIN. Fine by me.

JORGE. Now, please, do yourself a favor. Me, too, since I'm recommending you. Don't fuck up.

KEVIN. Cross my heart and hope to eat a dead frog.

JORGE. Good. Well, don't let the door hit you in the ass.

KEVIN. Okay, I'm gone.

(They shake hands. Quick hug. He exits.)

JORGE. *(Looks at proofs on his desk.)* Mañana. *(On phone:)* Izma, mira. We will deal with the proofs in the morning. And, we're holding lead space. End of the month. Listen, do you need a ride home, 'cause it wouldn't be a problem at all. Okay. G'night.

(Puts bottle back. Rolls his sleeves down, puts jacket on. Calls her back:)

Izma, I didn't mean anything by that, okay?

Never mind. See you tomorrow.

(Exits.)

A QUIET EMERGENCY

AN AMERICAN IN AFRICA

by Don Cheadle

DON. I crossed the border and wandered through a once-thriving village that is now nothing more than a ghost town. For nearly 20 years the Ugandan government has been involved in an armed conflict with a rebel group that calls itself the Lord's Resistance Army, or the LRA. The LRA has a particularly ugly way of replenishing its ranks: kidnapping.

(ALL chant underneath, foreshadowing the next play, "Blown Away":)

ENSEMBLE.

EMMETT TILL HAS BEEN KILLED AGAIN...

HE WAS A GOOD BOY, HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

POLICE LINE, DO NOT CROSS, EMMETT TILL HAS BEEN
KILLED AGAIN...

HE WAS A GOOD BOY, HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

DON. Their targets are children between the ages of 8 and 14. Rebels raid villages, stealing what they need, and burning the rest. According to UN estimates, more than 30,000 children have been forced into the service of the LRA since 1994. The older boys are taught to be soldiers and forced to fight against the better armed and organized Ugandan army and to murder anyone that they are ordered to. The girls are given to the commanders to be their wives.

ENSEMBLE. HE WAS A GOOD BOY, HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

DON. If you haven't heard too much about this story, you shouldn't be too surprised.

ENSEMBLE 1. This is a slow, bleeding emergency.

ENSEMBLE 2. two decades of slow death and rapid displacement.

ENSEMBLE 3. So nearly everyone in the northern part of Uganda has been displaced from their homes.

ALL. They suffer a quiet emergency.

DON. A quiet emergency. Gulu, in Uganda, has a daytime population of about 400,000, but at sunset that number swells and a long, forced march is underway.

ANET KURUI. Some walk for 2-1/2 hours to our camps. Some for four. Some walk for 30 minutes, depending on where you're coming from. We have children commuting from as far away as 30 kilometers from here.

DON. Children by the thousands—alone, in groups, and led by their parents—take to the road. They're heading to the city from the small villages dotting the surrounding countryside.

DON. This is Akelo, a 15-year old night commuter who has been coming to this camp for two months.

AKELO. *(Through INTERPRETER:)* I only come here because I fear the rebels, because if they take you to the bush you have to walk long distances carrying heavy loads, so I decide it is better if I can secure my life here than walk in the bush.

DON. Akelo knows what he's talking about. Last year he was taken by the rebels, but got away during a firefight.

AKELO. *(Through INTERPRETER:)* One day there was a crossfire between the LRA and the government. From that moment, I managed to escape.

DON. Morning. It's time for Akelo to head back home. a small village in the bush where he lives with his aunts.

AKELO. Both of my parents died of AIDS, one more epidemic, one more threat to the future of this country.

DON. Gulu has one of the highest rates of AIDS infection in Uganda. Akelo must walk more than hour each morning to get home. He usually eats one meal a day, at night, before he heads for the shelter.

AKELO. There are tens of thousands of children who have not been able to avoid that fate.

RICHARD. *(Through INTERPRETER:)* In order to protect my life I also had to submit, and I went to kill other people. I was an LRA

fighter for five years. One day I was taken in a group with some of my friends to go and kill some captives who had done some wrong things. All of us were refusing. Then suddenly they picked my closest friend and put him down and ordered us to kill him.

DON. Richard helped murder his friend...and many others

RICHARD. *(Through INTERPRETER:)* I don't very well remember the number of people I killed, but the measures of killing—we used clubs just to hit and smash their heads—which I did to many.

DON. At the age of 12, Agok was forced to kill LRA prisoners.

AGOK. *(Through INTERPRETER:)* They would get some of those people, bring them to our side and force us to kill.

DON. Alutu was 14 when she was taken. It was not her destiny to become a fighter, but to be exploited in another way.

ALUTU. *(Through INTERPRETER:)* So the commanders came to us one and by one and picked on us and we were forcibly made to become wives of the commanders.

DON. Richard, Agok, and Alutu now live in a rehabilitation camp run by World Vision in Gulu, run by Michael Oruni.

MICHAEL ORUNI. Many of these children have been forced to kill or witness killing. They have gone through rituals that have changed their understanding and have caused them to suffer in the mind. So what happens in this center is that we receive children who have come back from captivity and then we rehabilitate these children.

Turn the mind of the child back to normal society. Turn the child's mind back to non-violence. Turn the child's mind back to appreciate things and not to destroy.

DON. The Ugandan children seemed totally fascinated by my daughters. I wondered why they were so curious. Did my kids look so different? I said, "Could you ask them why they are so fascinated by them? At one point they were in the van and the kids were surrounding the van with their faces pressed against the glass like it was the zoo—like my daughters were the attraction at the zoo! I said, "What is it about them?" It's got to be their hair, because they

had the braids in their hair and all the kids there had short-cropped hair. “Is it their hair?” And they said—

INTERPRETER. “No. It’s the fact that they’re clean. (*All echo ‘clean’*) They’re so clean. These kids haven’t seen kids so clean. They all want to be that clean, too.”

DON. It’s a really basic thing. It wasn’t that they looked so different—it was that they weren’t dirty.

(ALL sung underneath:)

ENSEMBLE. EMMETT TILL HAS BEEN KILLED AGAIN...
HE WAS A GOOD BOY, HE WAS A GOOD BOY.
HE WAS A GOOD BOY, HE WAS—

DON. My daughters listened as the children told their stories of their brutal captivity. One night, my youngest said she couldn’t sleep. “I don’t want to put my head down and close my eyes.” I asked why. She said, “I start thinking and I have bad thoughts.” I said, “What are the bad thoughts?”

(ALL chant without music:)

ENSEMBLE. EMMETT TILL HAS BEEN KILLED AGAIN.

DON. She said, “I keep thinking about dying. I didn’t start thinking about it until I went to that camp.” And so I asked, “What are your concerns?” And she said, “Can that happen in the United States? Can what happens out here happen at home?”

BLOWN AWAY

by Gavin Lawrence

Scene 1

(With the house lights at half, the sounds of the street grow in volume and intensity. Two TEENAGERS enter from opposite sides of the stage. They face off and slowly start circling each other as the sound of an argument erupts in VOICE OVER. The sound of the argument intensifies as the house lights fade leaving them in a pool of light. There is sudden SILENCE as they quickly draw on each other. One quickly turns his gun on the AUDIENCE, then back to his adversary. The other then does the same. This is repeated several times until it becomes almost like a game. Finally, the guns are put away. The CHORUS enters and forms a SEMI- CIRCLE around the two young men who continue to look at each other.)

VOICE 1. *(Sung straight through:)*

WHERE DO THE CHILDREN GO WHEN
THE EARTH BLOWS AWAY?

(SPOKEN VOICES begin here:)

Whose ears will hear their screams?
And who will stay to embrace their thoughts?
When they have lost their dreams?
Why do the men in dirty suits
refuse to take the blame
For all the shit and pain they've left
As babies go insane?
With cries that reach for the farthest
Star but lost along the way
They'll beg for one way ticket stubs

(In the clear from any spoken words:)

The day the earth blows away, blows away, blows away.

ALL VOICES *(Spoken over VOICE 1 singing:)*

Whose ears will hear their screams?

VOICE 2.

And who will stay to embrace their thoughts

VOICE 3 & 4.

When they have lost their dreams?

VOICE 5 & 6.

Why do the men in dirty suits refuse to take the blame

VOICE 7 & 8.

For all the shit and pain they've left as babies go insane?

VOICE 9.

With cries that reach for the farthest star but lost along the way

ALL VOICES. They'll beg for one way ticket stubs, the day the earth blows away, the day the earth blows away, the day the earth blows away.

VOICE 9. With cries that reach for the farthest star but lost along the way

ALL VOICES. They'll beg the one way ticket stubs.

(The light slowly fades, but not before one of the TEENAGERS pulls his gun out again and shoots the other with barely a glow left on stage. In the darkness, screams and sirens are heard. Music is heard as the lights come up to reveal the teenager in a heap on the ground. As the song is sung, different members of the CHORUS will draw a chalk line around the body, and cordon off the area with yellow police tape with "POLICE LINE. DO NOT CROSS" written on it. If possible, the tape should extend into the audience and even be tied to some patrons chairs. The BODY is carried off stage during this song.)

ALL VOICES SUNG.

POLICE LINE, DO NOT CROSS, EMMETT TILL HAS BEEN
KILLED AGAIN...

HE WAS A GOOD BOY, HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

POLICE LINE, DO NOT CROSS, EMMETT TILL HAS BEEN
KILLED AGAIN...

HE WAS A GOOD BOY, HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

HE WAS A GOOD BOY, HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

VOICE 1.

HE WENT TO CHURCH ON SUNDAYS—THAT'S WHAT HE
DID.

HE WAS A GOOD BOY

ALL VOICES.

HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

VOICE 1.

HE WENT TO SCHOOL ON SOME DAYS—THAT'S WHAT HE
DID.

HE WAS A GOOD BOY

VOICE 8. HE WAS GOOD BOY, AND HE PAID RENT FOR HIS
MOMS AT THE BEGINNING OF EVERY MONTH NO MAT-
TER WHAT SHE SAID.

VOICE 1. AND HE'D COME HOME FROM WORK LATE AT
NIGHT AND DREAM OF BOATS AND KITES, BUT NOW
HE'S DEAD.

VOICE 1 & 8.

OH, EMMETT!

VOICE 4.

HE LIKED TO BALL ON WEDNESDAYS—THAT'S WHAT HE
DID.

HE WAS A GOOD BOY, HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

AND HE TALKED SMACK ON MOST DAYS—THAT'S WHAT
HE DID.

HE WAS A GOOD BOY

ALL VOICES.

HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

MEN & VOICE 4.

BUT HE SOLD DRUGS ON FRIDAYS TO THE PEOPLE IN THE
LEXUS,

WOMEN.

AND THE SAABS

ALL. AND THE MERCEDES BENZ.

VOICE 4. AND HE BOUGHT ICE CREAM FOR THE KIDS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD, AND SMILE WHEN THEY'D CALL HIS NAME.

VOICES 4, 1, 8. OH, EMMETT!

ALL VOICES.

POLICE LINE, DO NOT CROSS. EMMETT TILL HAS BEEN KILLED AGAIN.

HE WAS KILLED YESTERDAY.

HE IS KILLED TODAY. HE'LL BE KILLED AGAIN TOMORROW.

HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

VOICE 5.

HE WENT TO CHURCH ON SUNDAYS.

VOICE 9.

WENT TO SCHOOL ON SOME DAYS.

VOICE 3.

PLAYED BALL ON WEDNESDAYS.

VOICE 6.

TALKED SHIT ON MOST DAYS.

VOICE 7.

SOLD DRUGS ON FRIDAYS.

VOICE 8.

PAID RENT FOR HIS MOMS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MONTH.

ALL VOICES.

HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

VOICE 4.

HE CAME HOME AT SUNRISE AND DREAMT OF BOATS.

VOICE 1.

HE WAS THE FATHER OF TWO BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN AND THE OWNER OF TWO BEAUTIFUL WEAPONS.

VOICE 2.

AND A 2006 FIRE ENGINE RED HUMMER

ALL VOICES.

FULLY LOADED. HE WAS A GOOD BOY, HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

(SPOKEN FROM HERE.)

VOICE 1. He gave rides to the kids in the neighborhood and smiled when they called his name.

ALL VOICES. He was a good boy.

VOICE 7. He will be missed by

VOICES 7 & 1. Family

VOICES 7, 1 & 4. Friends

VOICES 7, 1, 4 & 8. And business associates.

ALL MEN. Funeral arrangements have not yet been made.

VOICE 8. If you miss the funeral A memorial service will be held on the sidewalk
By the blood stain

VOICES 8 & 1. Behind the tape of warning
Of futile desperation

VOICES 8, 1 & 4. The words, Making it official, Reminding us all.

ALL VOICES. *(SUNG:)*

EMMETT TILL HAS BEEN KILLED AGAIN.

VOICE 6.

HE WAS KILLED YESTERDAY.

VOICES 6, 1 & 4.

HE IS KILLED TODAY.

VOICES 6, 1, 4 & 8.

HE WILL BE KILLED AGAIN TOMORROW.

ALL MEN.

HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

ALL WOMEN.

HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

ALL MEN. (WOMEN *echo.*)

HE WAS A GOOD BOY. (He was a good boy)

ALL VOICES. HE WAS A, HE WAS A GOOD BOY.

Scene 2

(Three OBEAH MEN enter with body of the slain youth. They administer his “last rites” in a tight pool of light down stage. A drum beats out a rhythm that incorporates West African, Afro-Cuban, Nyabinghi, Reggae, and Hip Hop influences.)

ALL MEN. (*Sung:*)

CALLING ALL THE ANCESTORS, YOU SEE—A NEW ONE IS
DROWNING

CALLING ALL THE ANCESTORS, THE PLEA—A MOTHER IS
FROWNING

CALLING ALL THE ANCESTORS, CALLING ALL THE ANCES-
TORS

COME LOOK AT DIS ONE, MEK HIM HOLD ON TIGHT
ADMINISTER YOUR MAGIC, HIM NAH WANT DAT LIGHT YET
HOLD ON LITTLE BOY, MAN DON'T FRET, TOO YOUNG TO
WORRY 'BOUT DEATH. (*End sung.*)

OBEAH MAN 1. (*Dance hall style:*) Calling all the ancestors, dis boy him a holding on to life and him nah have much joy. So we a holding on to him and he a holding on to we, and we a beg you to hold on to dis ya one pickney. The blame not with him and dat is why we here. Somebody must answer, somebody must fear the wrath the anger that only Jah know, before dem put a price tag on his ya boy big toe.

(An approaching HELICOPTER is heard in the distance.)

OBEAH MAN 2. (*Rapping:*) Yo, I'm calling all the ancestors. It's about time we get busy, this ain't no nursery rhyme. It's really simple, as plain as the bling bling. Talk is cheap but I can make all the guilty sing fast. Turn your backs and I'll commence to put a cap in that ass. Before it's too late, 'cause death won't wait while some sorry intellectuals pontificate about this brother's fate.

(The HELICOPTER is directly above, shining its spotlight on the slain young man. OBEAH MAN 3 is forced to be heard over the hums, the drums, the beats, and the HELICOPTER. Everyone huddles close together, ducking to avoid the spinning blades.)

OBEAH MEN 3 AND 4. Echoing each other *(Spoken word feel.)* The call is out, out is the call to all who would listen to a story about this brother's fate. A fate that was determined before he ever learned to read the writing on the blood stained wall. A wall that still stands, because unlike walls in Berlin and Hiroshima, and unlike last night's lover, this wall refuses to go down, down, down. So we're calling all those who have come and gone because the word is out—we don't have a clue. Like the movie, we are...clueless.

(All sound out, except for the faint sound of the HELICOPTER with its spotlight now brighter than ever.)

VOICE 9.

Madness, Like a bird goes bump in the night
Landing on our nose, Scraping at our attention
Intrusions, Hold us prisoner
Uncover bones, Reveal worms

ALL VOICES.

And what of him? And what of them?

VOICE 9.

No answers yet.
No enlightenment in this new millennium.
And so we make this final call
This final shout out to those who have come and gone.

ALL VOICES.

The word is out.

VOICE 9.

We don't have a clue.

ALL VOICES.

The word is out.

VOICE 9.

We are

ALL VOICES.

Sho' 'nuff

VOICE 9.

Clueless.

(All SOUND OUT. The HELICOPTER spotlight turns quickly on the AUDIENCE and then back to the stage TWICE, finally resting on the audience and then splitting up, throwing two pools of light - one on the audience and the other on the lifeless BODY on stage. Spotlights fade.)

MALE VAUDEVILLIANS

(TRANSITION)

by Thomas W. Jones II

(As “Blown Away” ensemble exits in various directions, two MALE VAUDEVILLIANS enter in stylized fashion and take their place under a street light. Their dress is abstracted street attire somewhere between gangster rappers and performance gypsies.)

(CHORUS sings under the spoken words.)

(VAUDEVILLIAN TRANSITION MALE:)

MALE #2. Late night...long past

MALE #1. Midnight somewhere in Harlem

MALE #2. By way of South Central

MALE #1. To South Africa

MALE #1 & 2. Through Southside Chi

MALE #2. Under West Philly skies

MALE #1. Men darker than blue, pat down street corners percussively

MALE #2. Stranded under streetlights like unanswered questions...

MALE #1. Staring at the night through cautious eyes

MALE #2. Waiting for the beat down

MALE #1. From overdue rent...and underpaid life...

MALE #2. From the overanxious po...po...stranded and waiting for

MALE #1. The lies to flow

MALE #2. The jobs I won't know.

MALE #1. The thighs of some ho

MALE #2. The places I won't go

MALE #1. The stars that forget to show

MALE #2. I'll medicate these blues

MALE #1. Wear out another pair of shoes

MALE #2. Pay another day of dues

MALE #1. Rewind a Ray Charles coo

MALE #2. It do what it do baby

MALE #1. Wonder why I don't get out of bed

MALE #2. Why I oops upside your head

MALE #1. Wonder why I won't try

MALE #2. Spit the lie

MALE #1. Shut down before I let you see me cry.

MALE #2. Could be the world...

MALE #1. Do what it do...

MALE #2. Wonder why I love you when I don't

MALE #1. Hurt you then I won't.

MALE #2. Could be the world do what it do baby

MALE #1. Even when I can't

THE WORLD IS A GHETTO

by Yonas Assefa

(It is a story of a cross cultural married couple. The wife PEGGY is a Caucasian. The husband BEZZA is black, originally from Ethiopia. They have been married for three years, and they live in a one bedroom apartment in a small town called McFaron, Kansas. Both are college graduates, and they met in college.)

(Music segues in and out of the scene.)

PEGGY. Did you write the rent check yet, honey?

BEZZA. Yes, I did. Look at the check, Peggy.

PEGGY. I don't see it. Where is it? *(He doesn't reply.)* I think we should start looking around and seriously consider buying a house. I'm tired of paying rent and make nothing out of it.

BEZZA. You are going to live in it alone. I hate everything about this town. I can't wait to get the hell out of here.

PEGGY. Honey, don't just get worked up so early in the morning. It is too early. Don't ruin our weekend. I have been looking forward to this weekend.

BEZZA. Why? What is there to look forward to on a weekend in this town?

PEGGY. Because I love spending time with you, and I have some good news to share with you. But you!! You! You...

(She throws her arms in the air out of frustration and stares at him. BEZZA turns around, raising his voice.)

BEZZA. But what? You what? *(Walking to the living room:)*

PEGGY. But you don't love me as much as I do you. That is why—

BEZZA. *(Interrupting PEGGY:)* I didn't grow up with this shit, Peggy. I can't handle it: this town, work, white America, everything, Peggy. EVERYTHING!!

PEGGY. It is black America too, honey. Let us be fair here. Blacks stare at us too. They make remarks, laugh at us, and make faces, es-

pecially the women. I think it is about time you deal with it. I think you have lived in this country long enough to get used to its ugly faces just as much as its pretty faces. You know??

(Overlapping.)

BEZZA.

I am tired of it too
Every corner I turn all I see is
prejudice, mistrust, sarcastic
and nasty remarks. It is enough
I fight out there in the corporate
world on a daily basis. I don't
want to deal with it at home.

PEGGY.

Don't you see what they are
doing to us? You bring home all
the garbage they throw at
you and it stinks
I am tired of your attitude.

PEGGY. The Corporate culture impacts our lives, our careers, and our marriage.

And you are allowing that to happen. I was hoping to break the news under more pleasant circumstances, but I don't think there will ever be such a time with you.

BEZZA. Life is full of surprises. Go ahead and let me hear it.

(Silence.)

BEZZA. I said I am all ears. Go ahead!! Let me hear it.

PEGGY. I am pregnant.

BEZZA. What???? No, I don't believe you. You can't do that to me.

PEGGY. Believe it. It happened.

BEZZA. Oh, shit!! I just don't fuckin believe that. Peggy, sometimes you are just so fucking detached from reality.

PEGGY. The reality is I love you.

BEZZA. Reality Peggy, Reality! We are not ready to start a family! I don't want to bring another family member into it.

PEGGY. *(Overlapping BEZZA:)* The reality is that I have endured pain and suffering to the extent of giving up my family. The reality is that I also love this unborn thing inside of me. I love this baby. I want this child.

BEZZA. (*Overlapping PEGGY:*) I am not ready. I don't want to bring another innocent part of me into this world. Especially living in this town! Yeah, on unappreciated foreign nigger is enough.

(*PEGGY, softening a little bit:*)

PEGGY. Quit saying that, ok!. I married an intelligent, smart and handsome man.

BEZZA. You know Peg, at the end of the day, I want to feel that I have contributed something, and my contribution is worth recognition and appreciation. Guess what? It's all bullshit.

PEGGY. Oh, come on now, B. You are just allowing them to control you. Can't you see that?

BEZZA. Yeah, I sit there day- in and day-out in that corner saying nothing but crunching those dumb figures, nothing matters anymore. I hate this town.

PEGGY. You can make the difference. You are smart. You do more than just crunching figures. So don't say that. You are educated and trained to run a company.

(*BEZZA smiling faintly.*)

BEZZA. Do you see me doing that?

PEGGY. It's a matter of time. Keep investing time and learn the tricks of the trade and the nature of the game.

BEZZA. Yeah, they keep changing the nature of the game on you. That's exactly what is happening today in corporate America. Change, change, change!

(*Silence and PEGGY looks exasperated.*)

BEZZA. Yeah, they will find all kinds of excuses to keep you in that cage. All kinds of stinky shit that you cannot avoid. This town has no exposure for people who talk and look like me. Yeah, I can't dispute the fact that I have an accent.

(*Silence and PEGGY continues.*)

PEGGY. Honey, accent simply says that the language, whatever language you have an accent with is not your first language. It has nothing to do with your intelligence.

BEZZA. I know that, you know that. But it is an excuse. Hey, you are not trusted with a high profile, high revenue and a high profit margin client. You can't go out or travel to meet the client on business trips. So you work your ass off but somebody else will shine out there.

PEGGY. Well, speak up honey.

BEZZA. Speak up?

PEGGY. You have to speak up and express yourself. If you keep sitting quietly they are going to keep you there.

(BEZZA chuckles with sarcasm:)

BEZZA. You see, for people like me, you are either a very aggressive and a hostile person or anti-social unapproachable or just plain uncooperative and don't know the American way of Team Work. You can't have a bad day either. So your options are either to shut up and sit in your cage or walk out. But then, where can you go? This town is full of them. In this town, being an immigrant and being black on top of that is double jeopardy.

PEGGY. *(Silently amazed at his self-absorption:)* But, Bezza, what about our baby?

(BEZZA realizes the error of his ways, smiles.)

BEZZA. I have a story for you. Back in the old country, a poor peasant worked so hard and managed in buying a pregnant cow. He and his wife were so excited and started discussing about where to keep the unborn calf. The wife insisted on tying the calf in their hut by their squeaky wooden bed. The husband suggested to tying the baby calf by the kitchen close to the fire wood and light so he can keep an eye on it. Unfortunately, they ended up fighting bitterly before the calf was born. Both were already worried about the safety of their only beloved unborn calf. Go figure it, Peggy.

(They are reconciled.)

GODS OF WAR

by Carlyle Brown

(A group of AMERICAN ARMY GI's stand around an IRAQI PRISONER sitting cross legged on the ground with his hands tied behind his back and a black hood over his head.)

DONAR. Okay Rag Head let's talk. Talk to me. I know you speak English, don't you?

MARS. Leave him alone Donar.

DONAR. Leave him alone. I'm talking to the insurgency Mars.

MARS. You don't know who the fuck you're talking to. He could just be some asshole who was at the wrong place at the wrong time.

SETH. "The wrong place at the wrong time", that's what I call Iraq, the wrong place at the wrong time.

BELLONA. That's cute Seth, real cute.

DONAR. He was in the house, man.

MARS. Yeah, maybe that's because he fucking lived there.

SETH. "In the house." We in the house too, the Iraq house...

BELLONA. You get funnier every day Seth. You know that?

SETH. I'm just trying to be positive Bellona, positive and upbeat.

DONAR. He was in the house that HQ sent us in to flush out insurgents.

ESHARA. He was hiding out under the bed Donar.

ZROYA. And what was he doing hiding under the bed?

ESHARA. You'd be hiding too if mother-fuckers was shooting and blowing up shit all over the place.

SETH. Shit, I'd like to be hiding myself.

BELLONA. Why don't you get you a backbone solider?

SETH. I don't need me any backbone baby, just a bone. You know what I'm saying?

BELLONA. Don't make me bitch slap you.

SETH. Whoa! You're going to bitch slap me? What you going to do, pat me on the ass.

ZROYA. That's incorrect solidier. We've got us a situation here.

MARS. Situation? The situation may be that this guy might be an insurgent or he may be just some dude caught up in the round up.

ZROYA. Caught up in the round up?

DONAR. And how do know you that?

MARS. I don't know any more than you do, but I been there. DWB...

SETH. Driving while Black...

MARS. In the wrong place at the wrong time, neighborhood sweeps through the ghetto, police quota time...

BELLONA. That's a bunch a bull shit Mars. You don't live in any fucking ghetto. You went to college man.

MARS. Yeah, I've been to college, that's why I know. Chinks in Korea, Gooks in Vietnam, Rag Heads in Iraq, Niggers in the neighborhood. What the fuck is the difference?

ESHARA. What's the matter Bellona, you don't think people in the ghetto can go to college?

BELLONA. Fuck you bitch.

MARS. You're always talking that shit Donar. Rag Head this and Rag Head that, Jew nose mother fuckers...

ESHARA. You're not talking to Seth bitch. I'll put your ass on disability right now...

MARS. And where you learn that shit from? Probably fucking with niggers in Pennsylvania.

BELLONA. Well come on then and disable me ho.

DONAR. What the fuck you saying to me Mars. I watch your back man.

SETH. Now come on girls, don't disable each other. Disable me.

MARS. And I watch yours!

ZROYA. Hold up! Hold up! Everybody stop! This is bullshit. This is the enemy. Rag Head, Iraqi, whatever, he's the enemy not us. Why does it have to be a black thing?

ESHARA. Oh, oh, here we go. Miss Jessica Lynch speaks.

ZROYA. Jessica Lynch was a hero.

BELLONA. And what was that sister who was in that firefight with her? Just some bitch they won't even give her, her disability.

ZROYA. Yeah, all right, that was wrong. But that was then and this is now. Donar is only trying to interrogate the guy.

ESHARA. That isn't Donor's job. He doesn't speak Arabic.

SETH. Donar barely speaks English.

DONAR. Fuck you Seth.

SETH. I don't think you should do that man. I don't think it would sit well with Zroya.

BELLONA. What? Zroya, are you fucking Donar?

ZROYA. I'm not sleeping with Donar.

BELLONA. I didn't ask you if you were sleeping with him, I said are you fucking him?

MARS. You know my daddy was in Vietnam. That was the first war in American history that a black man didn't have to beg to fight to prove we were Americans. Yeah, you could go and bleed and die in the jungles and rice fields of some foreign land to earn you some rights you were already supposed to have in the first place. And now I'm here supposed to be fighting for somebody else's freedom and here we got him sitting here tied up with a bag over his head. All I'm saying Donar is that, that's fucked up. It sounds fucked up to me.

(Enter the CAPTAIN.)

CAPTAIN. What's going on here?

DONAR. We were about to interrogate the prisoner sir.

CAPTAIN. That's not your job Donar. We have people to do that. Now, what's going on here? The atmosphere seems a little tense. Donar?

DONAR. Nothing sir.

CAPTAIN. Mars?

MARS. Everything's fine sir...

CAPTAIN. Good. That's what I want to hear. 'Cause we all in this together right?

(There is a scattered wave of "Yes sir.")

DONAR. We're all in this together right?

ALL THE SOLIDERS. We're all in this together sargent!

CAPTAIN. All right... Now, who is this fucking Rag Head?

(Blackout.)

FEMALE VAUDEVILLIANS
(TRANSITION)

by Thomas W. Jones II

VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER. From head of state to head of household,

CHORUS. (*Sings:*) HABADI, MASURISANA

VAUDEVILLIAN LEADER. what's all so old is still all so new.

ALL SING.

THE WORLD IS A GHETTO, A GHETTO

IT BELONGS TO YOU AND ME

OOOOOOOOOOOO

OOOOOOOOOOOO.

THE MOTHER'S BOARD

by Jevetta Steele

(Description: OLDER SOUTHERN WOMAN, polished and refined – dressed in full church regalia. She is talking with a niece or YOUNGER FAMILY MEMBER who is having difficulties understanding the traditions and disposition of women in the family. It's a hot Sunday afternoon. It's a backyard family dinner gathering. Locking arms walking, searching for a cool place to rest, OLDER WOMAN speaks:)

Child, when did you become this beautiful? Why, with your father being so ill faced and poorly built, who'd think you'd have the natural wherewithal to be as striking as any matriarch of this family..."

(Finding two lawn chairs in the shade, they retire to talk.)

I look in your eyes and I see a collage of faces that I've known and loved all of my life.

(The young girl frowns and lowers her head.)

You don't get to decide where you come from. Your say-so comes in where you're headed—you have a voice there. I can see that you tire of the family's consistencies, but you can't change our history anymore than sunshine can sweeten trash! We are who we are—we've been where we've been.

Going to church was not an option when I was a child...it was a *way of life* for us. My sistas and I would run the daily ritual of chores and pressed hair on Saturday morning, laying out your Sunday morning attire that afternoon, all along making plans to attend some local church musical that evening. It wasn't an option of *whether or not to go to church*, you were going, and going on time...to Sunday school at 8AM, service at 11, YPWW (*Young People's Willing Workers*) at 5, and then evening worship shortly thereafter around 7! That's how it was. We sang songs of Zion while shouting and slobbering all over ourselves, calling on God late into the evening hours. You met your friends there, met your lovers there, and built

a life there filled with Hallelujahs and Amens to stories that seemed as familiar as any family album.

Preachers and politicians were synonymous. Whatever was going on in the community ...whatever the need—

Great or small, life started and ended with the all-caring and judging eye of the church. Oh yes, there was plenty of judgment to go around. In my church, we had all sorts of sayings and rules that were intended to keep us in a “right relationship” with God and our community. Pastor would say “Live your life as though it were your last day, using the Bible: B-I-B-L-E...Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth” manual. “for reaching God here and in the great beyond!”

We would sit there and listen with divided interest. Hoping that God didn't really care about our thoughts and deeds of want and lust only moments before entering His house and would take a little more time to consider giving us a little credit for all the hours we had spent in church the week before.

I don't think they trusted us or themselves. I mean really, church four to five times a week?! You need a few days in between there to commit a valid sin or sure up a mighty testimony! *(She laughs out loud.)*

It was so controlling that they even came up with an additional set of commandments just for the young folks. As if the originals were not enough for us to swallow. We were called “The Puritans.” You were permitted entrance at the tender age of 13 and along with your admittance came a commitment of chastity and devotion to the church and the community at large.

Right along side your weekly Bible verses you learned a few customaries. Now let's see if I can recall them all in order.

1. Stop and think before you drink.
2. Don't let your parents down, they brought you up.
3. Be humble enough to obey, you'll be giving orders yourself some day.
4. Never offer criticism without also offering a better remedy.
5. At the first moment, turn away from all unclean thinking.

6. Choose a date that will make a good mate.
7. Go to church faithfully. The Creator gives you a week. Give Him back at least an hour.
8. Avoid following a crowd. Be an engine and not a caboose.
9. Choose your friends carefully. You are what they are. And finally,
10. Keep the original Ten Commandments!

(She laughs, enjoying the memory. She reclines and quiets her own spirit, returning to the present.)

Yes. It is food for thought. Listen. I know you have more questions than answers. And I also know that your thoughts are a montage of voices that are as confusing and colorful as a rainbow without rain. But I want you to know that you're not alone. We all understand. Some of us just have a tough time with the remembering. You're going to be all right...more than all right. Take a step back, breathe and PUSH! PUSH, as Momma would say. P-U-S-H: Pray until Something Happens. I know deep down inside my knower that everything will be all right.

(She sings a song of encouragement that's old and traditional in nature.)

KEEPIN' IT REAL

by David Barr III

(Voice over swells in the darkness. The voice of BARRY BONDS, San Francisco Giants slugger and homerun king, holding his now infamous press conference during Spring Training 2005, attacking the media for exacerbating his alleged steroid usage. Lights up on BRAD {White, casual dressed and laid back, almost laissez faire} and DeANDRE {Black, buttoned down conservative. Prim and proper, over articulate, almost pedantic}. It is Tampa, Florida. Both men are beat reporters and are in mid conversation. They are seated in front of TV cameras wearing portable microphones. It is minutes before they are to appear live, in a point/counterpoint TV interview on ESPN's "Outside The Lines".)

DeANDRE. I don't believe him.

BRAD. It could have happened.

DeANDRE. It's possible. But I *still* don't believe him.

BRAD. Say you're wrong.

DeANDRE. Okay. But I'm not.

BRAD. Say...the entire world is wrong and the man is innocent. What then?

DeANDRE. Then we're all wrong. But I still think he's full of shit. And so do you.

BRAD. Come on, man. You're more open minded than that.

DeANDRE. I am keeping an open mind. The fact that I even accepted the assignment to cover his press conference is proof positive that I am not biased against the man. Even though he is a pure ass.

BRAD. You have an open mind because it's two weeks Spring Training in sunny Florida...as opposed to cloudy Chicago.

DeANDRE. 'True dat.'

STAGE MANAGER. "Two minutes gentlemen! Two minutes!"

BRAD / DeANDRE. “Thanks.”

BRAD. Doesn't it bother you, as a Black man, that this is yet another thinly veiled 'lynching' of a Black athlete?

DeANDRE. A 'lynching'?

BRAD. Look at it this way. Tyson, O.J., Iverson, Spreewell, Randy Moss. Now the highest profile Black 'jock' of them all...Barry Bonds.

DeANDRE. No.

BRAD. Why not?

DeANDRE. Because all of those dudes are guilty, man. Guilty as sin. They deserve what they get. Or don't get. White 'folks' aren't the only ones who are tired of ungrateful, spoiled Black athletes making millions and spitting in the eye of the fans. And furthermore, how did I become the official 'Negro' *major domo* for the actions of my entire race?

BRAD. That's not what I meant.

DeANDRE. Do I ask *you* to represent John Rocker, Jason Giambi, or Mark McGuire... as a 'White man'?

STAGE MANAGER. “One minute, gentlemen! One minute!”

BRAD / DeANDRE. “Thanks!”

BRAD. There's no way in the world they'd treat McGuire like this.

DeANDRE. *Like what?* Bonds is an *ass*, he treats the media like shit, and he admitted he took illegal steroids. *Accidental* or not. Why should I have to kiss this fool's behind and protect him in my columns just because he's the same color? Hell naw. I earned my keep to be here...now it's his turn.

BRAD. You don't think he's earned his keep?.

DeANDRE. He cheated, Brad.

BRAD. So you say.

DeANDRE. So *he* says.

STAGE MANAGER. “Thirty seconds, guys! Thirty seconds!”

BRAD / DeANDRE. “Thanks!”

BRAD. Look it. All I’m saying is that everybody deserves the benefit of the doubt. That’s all I’m saying. The owners turned a blind eye to it for years. So did the Players Association. Why should we be the morality police?

DeANDRE. Because it’s wrong, man. That’s why. It sends a hell of a message. Saying that the only way Blacks can achieve is to cheat their way to the top. People like Bonds, Michael Jackson, and O.J. probably set this country back 50 years with their myopic, selfish attitudes and it’s time somebody said something about it.

BRAD. And that’s our job?

DeANDRE. We speak for the man in the street. The public. The fan. If we don’t, who will?

BRAD. Man, climb down off that cross...we need the wood.

(The intro theme from ESPN’s investigative sports program “Outside The Lines” swells in the distance.)

STAGE MANAGER. “Alright fellas. And we are a go in five, four, three, two and...”

(Camera lights flash on. BRAD and DeANDRE straighten up and literally change postures. Now BRAD adopts a more rigid, back stiffened posture. DeANDRE starts to lean, almost slumping in a more relaxed, but street hardened defiant seating style.)

BOB. “We’re back...on ‘Outside The Lines’. Today we are discussing the Barry Bonds situation and his possible usage of illegal steroids to set baseball’s most hallowed record. Hank Aaron’s 755 all time home run mark. With us right now are two members of the Baseball Writers Association, and beat reporters who have covered Barry Bonds for the past 15 years. First DeAndre Patterson of Chicago’s leading African-American newspaper... *The Chicago Sentinel*...”

DeANDRE. Good morning, Bob.

BOB. “And lastly conservative, radio, talk show host Brad Wokowski of KRAPP’s ‘The Big Ticket’ in Los Angeles.”

BRAD. Hi Bob.

BOB. “Welcome both of you. Let’s get right to it. DeAndre, you’ve known Barry Bonds since he first came into the league. Do you accept his explanation that he unwittingly took illegal steroids by accident? And that he has been clean before and since?”

DeANDRE. Yes I do, Bob. In America, we are still innocent until proven guilty. Why should he fight so hard to prove a negative. Either way he loses. It’s obvious that this is nothing more than another sports related, ‘high tech lynching’ of a high profile Black athlete. Nothing more. If Barry was a White ball player, you wouldn’t even hear a whisper from the public or media.

BOB. “Wow. What do you think about that, Brad?”

BRAD. Well...I think he’s guilty. No question about it. I think he took those steroids and all of his records from that point forward should have an asterisk beside them. I’d even consider having all his MVP awards stripped.

DeANDRE. You see, Bob. This is the type of frontier, closet racism that exists in the media today toward Black athletes.

BRAD. Oh please.

DeANDRE. Here’s is someone who has no idea what it’s like to be a Black man in America. And Brad sure doesn’t understand what it takes to be a high profile Black athlete in today’s America. The pressures. The ever, uneven playing field. Always having to be twice as good and twice as clean as his peers...because the cards are stacked from the beginning.

BRAD. I know about excuses. I know about rationalizations. And I know about right and wrong. Barry Bonds has admitted in open court...

DeANDRE. *Excuse me!* He said what he said under a **sealed** grand jury testimony that was revealed to the public...illegally...I might add.

BRAD. He admitted in open court that he illegally used performance enhancing drugs. What else needs to be said?

BOB. “Well on that note, I think we should take a quick break to pay some bills. We’ll be back with Brad Wojokowski and DeAndre Patterson in 2 minutes.”

(Show theme music swells up and out. Once again the two adopt their original personas.)

STAGE MANAGER. And we’re clear!

BRAD. Hey, don’t pop a hamstring backpedaling, DeAndre.

DeANDRE. Me? The only *windsocking* going on in here is blowing from your side of the studio, pal.

BRAD. Hey, if I were you, I’d stay away from open areas today. There’s lightning in the forecast.

DeANDRE. Hey, you smell that? It’s coming from your direction. It smells like...like...*bullshit*.

BRAD. I *have* to talk this way for my listeners to stay interested in my show.

DeANDRE. Same here, pal. Most Black people aren’t ready for one of their own to spit out conservative views.

STAGE MANAGER. “Alright, fellas. We’re back in five, four, three, two...and...”

(Show theme music from ‘Outside The Lines’ swells again. Voice over up again.)

BOB. “We’re back again on ‘Outside The Lines.’ We are discussing the Barry Bonds, steroids situation. Guys, in the 30 seconds we have left in this final segment where do you think this is going? Let’s start with you DeAndre.”

DeANDRE. I think 15 years later, the media is still looking for recompense for O.J. And they aren’t going to rest until they get it. This is all just an excuse, a rationalization to discriminate. Barry Bonds is just the latest sacrificial Black sheep in the sports witch hunt.

BRAD. Witch hunt? If you can't do the crime, you shouldn't do the crime.

DeANDRE. Oh, now this brother is a 'criminal'?

BRAD. Boy, one thing O.J. taught us. Money changes everything. If these guys make 18 million a year or 18 cents. Black or Purple they should be punished if they do something wrong.

DeANDRE. Thanks massa, Brad.

BRAD. Oh come on, Dee.

BOB. "On that note we'll have to leave the conversation there. I want to thank you both for appearing on tonight's show..."

(Theme show music swells and fades.)

STAGE MANAGER. "That's a wrap. Thanks fellas. You guys were great."

BRAD / DeANDRE. "Thanks."

DeANDRE. So...what's our tee time, tomorrow?

BRAD. Noon. I've got a show. Tomorrow is our regular "Bullcrapper Of The Week" segment. It's the most popular segment on the station and I always host. What can you do? I need to eat, too.

(They shake hands.)

DeANDRE. Hazards of the job.

BRAD. Yeah, hazards of the job. Noon?

DeANDRE. Noon.

(Lights slowly fade on scene.)

SECRETARY OF SHAKE

by Eisa Davis

(A warehouse. a beautiful WOMAN dressed in a velour sweatsuit [36] walks in and sits on a chair next to another WOMAN, who wears a terry cloth sweatsuit [25] there is a full-length mirror on the wall between them.)

(they wait.)

25. you going in first?

36. my audition was for 2. you?

25. 215. must be running behind.

are they taking people according to appointment time or sign-in time?

36. I don't know. but you signed in first, you can go.

25. no, you were at 2. you go.

36. it doesn't matter. whatever. they'll call us.

(a silence.)

25. it's kinda weird to be auditioning for a reality show.

36. why? they already got cameras on us all the damn time. might as well get paid for it.

this place is way out in the boonies, though. I want reimbursement for my mileage.

25. yeah, well they have to be top secret about it. did you go through that security check?

36. oh mama. and the background check?

25. mine was pretty easy, only 2 weeks long.

36. huh.

25. how long was yours?

36. something like that.

(a silence. 36 begins to remove her sweats, revealing silver or gold lamé hot pants. she begins to stretch. 25 takes off her sweats as well, and is dressed in an equally erotic outfit.)

25. so what did you major in in school?

36. I was organic chemistry with a concentration in biological weaponry.

25. that's perfect. I was international relations, focusing on Korean/South Asian/Middle Eastern nuclear proliferation, with a minor in German history. any field work in intelligence?

36. if I had it I couldn't tell you.

25. diplomacy?

36. what's this we're doing right now?

25. when did you start dancing?

36. question is when will I stop?

25. you've done so many videos. this is strange to say but it's even stranger if I don't—I've been watching your work for years and you're my idol.

36. thank you.

25. and archrival. it always comes down to me and you when they're casting the main ho.

36. I've caught your work too. I always know when a move is out of date once *you* do it.

25. actually, I'd call myself an unsung originator. remember the Sammy Say So shoot?

36. barely. I was in the hot tub. favor for a friend.

25. I was working Sammy out with this—

(25 does moves.)

36. oh I remember that one.

25. and this—

(another move.)

36. girl, nuh uh.

25. and then—

(the move de move.)

36. yeah that was the bomb and then— isn't there a hair flip at the end?

25. exactly. I made up the whole routine and then they gave it to this other ho with a blonde weave.

36. if you have blonde hair, that's hotter, people will always choose you to be the main ho. it's just business and we're in it.

25. but your weave is red.

36. it's to set me apart.

25. so they gave the blonde bitch my moves which *everyone* bit after that. put her in every men's magazine swimsuit issue. and they put *me* in the hot tub. that's where I met *you*.

36. I don't remember.

25. we were kissing. in the hot tub? they wanted some girl-on-girl so it would look hot.

36. that was you? they have me kissing every ho these days.

25. I couldn't believe it was you, who I looked up to—I mean all the strippers and drag queens bite your style.

36. well. I just know what gets em started that's all. show me what you're going to do in there, I'll give you some pointers.

25. really?

36. I told you—diplomacy is key.

(25 stands up and does a few moves.)

25. I'm going to do my new shit, a style nobody has seen—

36. nice, that was a nice one—

25. then I'll just tweak em out with something at the end, just something they won't expect, like—

(25 pulls open her top and flashes her nipple.)

36. *why did you do that?*

25. because—I don't know—it was funny. an ironic reference.

36. you can't be ironic in this job.

25. it was a joke!

36. don't be smart! they don't want smart!

25. but I am!

36. then what was your smarty pants joke *for*?

25. I don't know, it was an impulse. I was making a comment. and my body is beautiful, what's wrong with showing it?

36. *(An oath to the sky:)* in the name of Katherine Dunham, Alvin Ailey, and Savion Glover, let me save this child. *(To 25:)* they don't want that. the nipple? you think that's funny? no. it's too real. makes em start thinking about their nanny and slavery. you don't want reality on a reality show! I'm serious as a heart attack. now listen to me—are you listening? you must *tease*. don't *ever* give up the nipple! keep it covered. *that's* hardcore. *that's* the key to diplomacy. *that's* your big stick. the nipple is what they have to get on their knees and beg for.

DISEMBODIED MALE VOICE. 36?

36. yes?

VOICE. ready?

(36 stands up and shakes her hair out, looking for where the VOICE is coming from.)

36. the question is, are you.

VOICE. I hope I am. and 25.

25. yes?

VOICE. groups of two. let's go.

25. sure. where.

VOICE. No need to move, girls. stay right there. all we want to do is ask you one more question and see you move a little bit more, alright? let's start with the verbal. now—why do you want to be a back up dancer to the Secretary of State?

(25 and 36 overlap trying to upstage the other.)

36. I need stability 'cause them damn videos don't pay rent—

25. well, you get to travel—

36. can you see me at the damn post office—

25. meeting the people who run the planet would be really interesting—

VOICE. girls, girls, I know you're used to synchronizing as dancers, but one at a time please. take solos, alright? 25 first. why do you want to be on *Secretary of Shake*?

25. I think—

36. *(Under her breath to 25:)* don't be smart!

25. I think that—life is too separated. um—people get mad when certain things or people come together that they think should stay apart, but everything needs everything else, like night needs day to feel special, the moon needs the sun to look cool, and the Secretary of State should have back up dancers because—it's more fun and there would be less war.

VOICE. okay. great, thank you very much. 36, same question. why dance back up to the Secretary of State? after 400 plus years without booty shaking in the Cabinet, why are you necessary?

36. look. I'm never back up, I am always the main ho. I am the principal dancer, the prime mover—that's an anatomical term I like to use on suckers like you. but let me tell you something. we need some change. we've got to have some dance ambassadors to set things straight cross this world. and let me say, if I could tour with the Secretary of State—*this* Secretary of State who rocks the mic like she do, flipping facts like flapjacks, this ho who is so gangsta she don't even have meetings 'cause she ain't interested in what anyone

else have to say, I mean somebody who rolls like that needs some back up dancers. like fully. like now. like it's a crime she been doin her geopolitical thing without us. if I taught her some moves, we could actually get somewhere. think about it. my girl don't even know where her body is! once she get out of her head tryin to prove she's smarter than everybody, I could teach her a lot about herself. *and I know French.*

VOICE. well. wonderful. now—wow. could you two dance for us in a way that says what you just said but without words?

(25 starts to move.)

25. like this?

VOICE. perfect.

(36 begins to move too. they both dance in silence. and lights fade as the VOICE speaks.)

VOICE. this is—this is great. look at that. whoa. we'll uh—get back to you if uh, we, whoa!—uh, want you, um—wow...

COME SO FAR

by Kia Corthron

(In the darkness a crowd repeats a chant: "NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE!" Suddenly and simultaneously: sound out, lights up. Seated behind a table are the BLACK STUDENT UNION PRESIDENT and the SPEAKER. Behind THEM is a blackboard or dry ink board.)

ALL STUDENTS. *No Justice, No Peace, No Justice, No Peace, No Justice, No Peace,*

BLACK STUDENT UNION PRESIDENT. Controversy, I have always believed, is the fuel of progression. Your very presence on our campus has incited protests public and private. A fist fight in the cafeteria!

SPEAKER. *(Smile.)* A black Republican is not the enemy. *(A rumble, mostly of disapproval, from the audience.)* I imagine there are many among you who would be surprised to know yours is not the first Black Student Union I've addressed. I am proud to have been lauded with honorary degrees from several African-American institutions, including Atlanta's prestigious Morehouse College.

STUDENT 1. Did you have an oil tanker named after you?

BSU PRESIDENT. We'll take questions and answers at the end! *(To the SPEAKER:)* Your parents were teachers?

SPEAKER. I was born in 1954 Birmingham, the only child of two university professors. My father was a minister, my mother a music teacher. My given name as a matter of fact is a variation on the Italian musical term *condolcezza*, which means "with sweetness." *(STUDENT 1 laughs, loud and forced.)* Yes, I know what most of you are thinking. "Bourgey black." *(ALL: "Bourgey")* That's an easy 21st Century assessment. *(ALL: "Bourgey!")* When I was six, my schoolmate Denise McNair was one of the four little girls murdered in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing.

STUDENT 2. Six, that would have made you nine...

SPEAKER. Yes, my family had the advantage of education

STUDENT 1. But not math.

SPEAKER. I was taught early on if I were to achieve I would have to be “twice as good”—but in 1963 Alabama—

STUDENT 1. What do you know about education...

SPEAKER. At fifteen years of age I enrolled in the University of Denver as a freshman with the intention of becoming a concert pianist and, as part of the curriculum, took a course on international politics.

STUDENT 2. Did you play with Yo-Yo Ma?

STUDENT 3. Are you running for president in 2008?

STUDENT 1. What about the *oil tanker*?

BSU PRESIDENT. *Please!*

SPEAKER. At nineteen I graduated cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa with a bachelor’s in political science. A year later I had earned my master’s from the University of Notre Dame, and ultimately my Ph.D. from the University of Denver. In 1981 I ended my six-year tenure at Stanford University as provost. I am fluent in Spanish, French and Russian.

STUDENT 1. How about Swahili? (*Scattered giggles.*)

SPEAKER. Had I been assigned to diplomatic relations in Africa I certainly would have undertaken it. (*Beat.*) In committing myself to international policy and peace making, I have not wholly abandoned my musical aspirations. My dream was fulfilled in April of 2002 when I was honored to accompany cellist Yo-Yo Ma on Brahms’ *Violin Sonata in D Minor* at Constitution Hall.

STUDENT 2. Yo Yo Mama

SPEAKER. If there is time later I may present to you a little composition I’ve been working on.

I look out at a room of young, black faces and I guess that most of you, even at this late date, are still registered with the Democratic Party. Throughout most of the 20th Century the common wisdom has upheld the Democrats as the political saviors of the African-

American people. (*Scattered "Uh Huh"s.*) You try to tell the truth, provide some transparency and the country's in an uproar.

STUDENT 1. What About those WMD's?

SPEAKER. Ah well. Such leveled criticism is always passing. But consider this: Fifty years ago would any American have even dreamed that a black woman would be holding the position of Secretary of State? We have come so far!

STUDENT. How Far?

ALL STUDENTS. Not Far.

SPEAKER. With all the harping of the Democrats on our differences, it's no wonder the Far Right begins its litany of "black welfare mothers" and "black deadbeat fathers" and "black drug dealers."

STUDENT 2. Oh no she didn't.

SPEAKER. And the insinuations that, as an African-American woman, my appointment was only strategy on the part of the Republican Party,

STUDENT 1. Well...

SPEAKER. A scheme to court the black vote.

STUDENTS. Well...

SPEAKER. Such propaganda perpetuated by the Liberal-Left wreaks of its own patronizing racism, its rejection of the possibility that a president could appoint a secretary of state not because he saw black and female but because he considered that black female to be the most qualified American for the job. (*STUDENTS Hum 'We shall overcome' underneath.*) I *did* overcome the gross impediments of race prejudice growing up in Birmingham, and every one of you can overcome as well. Make no mistake: I am not here to recruit for the Republican Party. (*End hum.*) I only wish to illustrate that if the *only* reason you are voting Democrat is because the candidate is not Republican, then you are asking much too little of your chosen representatives.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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