

PERUSAL SCRIPT



Newport, Maine

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HOW DO WE FEEL RIGHT NOW?

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Original cover art by Alison Porras and Sarah Roderick

LBT ORDER #3327

*Dedicated to the men, women, and children whose lives,
Whether directly or indirectly,
Are negatively impacted by racism and social injustice.*

CAST OF CHARACTERS — 31: 7m 19f 5either

INTRODUCTION NARRATORS
MICHELLE OBAMA NARRATOR
JULIE
JAEEL
TATI 1-4
CHRIS
DANA 1 & 2
DARIAN JAIME
R.P.
MAY
KAYLA
JULIANNA
STEPHANIE
NADEGE
PAM
HERNZ
FREDDIE 1-10
ANDREW 1-4
JOE 1-3
KIARA 1-7
WHITE MALE FRIEND
THE GIRLFRIEND
STEVEN
LAURA
HILARY
MYRNA 1 & 2
JONATHAN
NATHALIE
NORA
KAREMA

SCENE LIST

INTRODUCTION
MICHELLE OBAMA ALWAYS SAYS IT BEST
THIS IS WHAT RESILIENCE SOUNDS LIKE
TONE DEAF AMERICA
WHAT I SEE HAPPENING AROUND ME (PART 1)
JUST...STOP. PLEASE
I AM ANGRY ALL OF THE DAMN TIME
WILL IT EVER END
THE SYSTEM
A PIECE OF MY WOMB

I HEAR YOU
STOP KILLING US
THE RIGHT THING TO DO
ARE MY PEOPLE OKAY?
SIMPLY TIRED
AFRICAN AMERICAN HUMANS
NOW?
TOP 10 REASONS WHY I AM SO TIRED OF BEING TIRED
STORIES THAT LEAVE SCARS
DESPITE BEING TIRED AND SCARRED, I AM HOPEFUL
WHAT I SEE HAPPENING ALL AROUND ME (PART 2)
WHAT THE PEOPLE HAVE TO SAY
MY EGO
WHAT I SEE HAPPENING ALL AROUND ME (PART 3)
CHANGE BEGINS WITH YOU
WHAT'S ON MY MIND
WHAT WILL MAKE THINGS BETTER
WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER
LEARNING TO REST AND DISCONNECT IN MINNEAPOLIS
WHAT SIDE OF HISTORY WILL YOU BE ON?
CREATE CHANGE

BACKGROUND

June 2, 2020A friend of mine reached out to me in despair over her fear of being a person of color in today's social and political situation. Her message read, *Reaching out. I am crying between client calls. Please hold me in your thoughts. I have never been this scared, this vulnerable, as a person of color.*

A few days earlier, on May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a Black man in Minneapolis, Minnesota was murdered while being arrested. The arresting officer kneeled on his neck for almost nine minutes straight. Three other officers on the scene also kneeled on Mr. Floyd's body during the arrest. Protests began nationwide. White supremacist groups took advantage of the situation, inciting more chaos and destruction, posing as "Antifa." Local businesses were burned and looted. President Trump called in the National Guard and the Army to "dominate" the unrest. Social media lit up like a Christmas tree with posts from people telling their stories of fear, distrust, pain, sadness, and, most often, exhaustion. The calls for white people to assist and support started pouring in. It was time for real allyship to emerge.

Scrolling through Facebook, I started closely reading their often- traumatic stories. Wanting to do something effective, I started re- posting their stories on my own page so more people would read them. Over and over again, I'd read accounts and perspectives that were not my own but with whom I empathized, and found solidarity. I wanted to do something more. I wanted to use social media for good.

In our messaging, my friend asked, *Have you ever written your own play?* My first thought was, *uh...no. I direct playsI don't WRITE them.* My second thought, *if I can do anything, maybe I can do THIS.*

I started to collect these stories from a wide variety of people whose lives had crossed paths with mine at

some point, and they are all dear to me. Most are former students of mine from Spring Valley High School, part of the East Ramapo Central School District. About 97% of the public-school students there are people of color, many of whom experience poverty, are immigrants, and are desperate to find a better way to live. It is a community that is not unfamiliar with the inequities of racism and intolerance.

This piece exposes the feelings and responses in the aftermath of this pivotal point in American history of people who are of color and not of color, but who share the common belief that racism must be rooted out immediately and with impunity.

I would like to thank my brave friends who shared their bold narratives.

Without them offering their deepest and most difficult thoughts, during a period of such uncertainty and unrest, this play would not exist. I am eternally grateful for their generosity of spirit and clarity of thought.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Casting: The play is intended to have actors double-up on roles. Longer passages have been split up into smaller chunks so that no one actor has pages of dialogue to memorize. You can certainly choose to use one person for a longer passage—that is the director's choice. For the most part, the voices (unless specifically indicated) are voices of people of color. Obviously, different theatre groups have different casting pools. This shouldn't deter you from mounting the production, however it is extremely important that the narratives of people of color are presented from their perspective. Our first production had an all-female cast of 18.

While it goes without saying, I will say it anyway: **NO BLACK FACE SHOULD EVER BE USED.** Speaking as an ally, a kindred spirit, a supporter of those whose voices needs to be heard, I believe these roles can be done by a person who is not of color, as long as the performances are approached with respect for the experience of the characters. The roles of Hernz, Freddie, Andrew, and Joe are the voices of Black males, but again the important takeaway is that you are telling their story, no matter who is playing the roles. You have some flexibility in casting the other roles, but the characters who are indicated as white should be approached from that perspective.

A note about the setting: this piece takes place during the COVID-19 pandemic that started in early 2020. We were in a global lockdown for an indeterminate amount of time, experienced social isolation, and never went anywhere without a protective mask. As we move further away from this time and find our way back to "normal," these concepts should be considered as you approach the direction of your production.

While you may not change the wording of the dialogue, you may decide to change the order of the passages. I think it works best as scripted, but a director might want to change the order for a specific dramatic effect. Each passage represents an important facet in the expression of the complexities of racial injustice and must be performed as is.

The show can be performed with or without an intermission. The audience might need a break, especially within a school community, given the difficult nature of the material.

While the production is designed as a stage play, our first production was mounted during the 2020 pandemic, when much of our school year was done remotely. We created a virtual presentation for a limited release. Please obtain the correct licensing to do so if that is your desire for performance.

How Do We Feel Right Now? was first performed by Spring Valley High School's Thespian Troupe 721 on December 3, 2020 under the direction of Stacey Tirro with the following cast:

NARRATORS — Charlene Aurelus, Dinajah Green, Chelsy Louisthelmy

OBAMA NARRATOR — Jimna Aurelus

JULIE — Genesis Palma

JAEL — Jimna Aurelus

TATI 1-4 — Ebony Nixon, Tatiana Gabriel, Jimna Aurelus, Chelsy Louisthelmy, Rivka Coffy

CHRIS — Jennifer Ojeda

DANA 1 & 2 — Alison Porras, Anijah Smith

DARIAN — Anastasia Calixte

MAY — Genesis Palma

R.P. — Anijah Smith

KAYLA — Dinajah Green

JULIANNA — Jennifer Ojeda

STEPHANIE — Tatiana Gabriel

NADEGE — Jimna Aurelus

HERNZ — Kiara Pierristil, Anastasia Calixte, Ebony Nixon

FREDDIE 1-10 — Ashley Amaning, Dinajah Green, Tatiana Gabriel, Khiara Worrell

ANDREW 1-4 — Rivka Coffy, Charlene Aurelus, Briannah Marseille

JAIME — Ashley Amaning

JOE 1-3 — Anijah Smith, Jimna Aurelus, Ebony Nixon

PAM — Tea Hubert, Alison Porras, Jennifer Ojeda

KIARA 1-7 — Kiara Pierristil, Ashley Amaning

WHITE MALE FRIEND — Jennifer Ojeda

THE GIRLFRIEND — Briannah Marseille

ANOTHER VOICE — Dinajah Green

STEVEN — Alison Porras

LAURA — Tea Hubert

HILARY — Genesis Palma

MYRNA 1 & 2 — Rivka Coffy, Briannah Marseille

JONATHAN — Alison Porras

NORA — Tea Hubert

KAREMA — Anastasia Calixte

“Now?” (song) was recorded and performed by special arrangement with Stacey Tirro and Hernz Laguerre, Jr.

Lead Vocal Jimna Aurelus

Ensemble Ashley Amaning, Charlene Aurelus, Rivka Coffy, Kiara Pierristil, Jennifer Ojeda, Alison Porras, Khiara Worrell

HOW DO WE FEEL RIGHT NOW? a collection of raw thoughts in the aftermath of senseless tragedy by *Stacey Tirro*. 31 roles: 7m 19f 5either (Doubling encouraged). Simple settings. Contemporary costumes. 85 Minutes. On May 25, 2020, amidst a pandemic that shut the world down, George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis by arresting officers when they kneeled on his neck for nearly nine minutes. For many people in our nation, and our local community, this was the breaking point. Patience and hope crumbled as protests escalated into riots around the world. Wounds that were already open were further torn apart. People of color, and their allies, expressed their disbelief, exhaustion and sadness over the fact that over fifty years has passed since the Civil Rights Act, and we are still fighting for equal and fair treatment in our society. *How Do We Feel Right Now?* is a collection of those narratives - real-time responses in the days and weeks following the tragedy. It is also an expression of the new work that is being done to create change and the allyship that is being forged as a result. As a monologue-based play with lots of possibilities for competition performance, it is ideal for either live or virtual productions. The characters range from adolescence through adulthood, and there is a great deal of flexibility in casting. *How Do We Feel Right Now?* was created with students in mind - individuals of color, most from struggling, immigrant families - who live in the reality of a system that does not always serve them. While the catalyst for its creation was a specific event, the feelings represented in the piece have been alive for hundreds of years. I hope this play will serve as an educational guide to help validate these feelings in the BIPOC community, as well as instruct those who do not have skin that is some shade of brown to be more empathetic and supportive of those that are struggling. **Music:** The song, "Now?", written by Stacey Tirro and Hernz Laguerre, Jr. was performed in the original production of *How Do We Feel Right Now?* and is available for your production. **ORDER # 3327**

Stacey Tirro is a dance, theatre and physical education teacher at Spring Valley High School in Spring Valley, New York, in the East Ramapo Central School District. Of the 97% of the public-school families who are Black and/or Hispanic, most are first- and/or second-generation immigrants. She has been the advisor for Spring Valley's International Thespian Troupe 721 for 25 years and has produced over 50 plays and musicals with them as well as over 20 concerts with her dance students. Her work has been recognized in *American Theatre Magazine*, *TheatreFolk*, *The Unsealed*, *Strong Women Project Magazine* and *Erika's Lighthouse*. She is proud to have produced *How Do We Feel Right Now?*, her debut playscript with her beloved Thespians. It is her hope that the sentiments expressed in this piece are heard with open ears, so that we may create communities that are safer and more inclusive for every person to live their best life.

HOW DO WE FEEL RIGHT NOW?

ACT I

INTRODUCTION

NARRATOR #1: On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a Black man in Minneapolis, Minnesota was murdered while being arrested. The arresting officer kneeled on his neck for almost nine minutes straight. Three other officers on the scene also kneeled on Mr. Floyd’s body during the arrest. Protests began nationwide. White supremacist groups took advantage of the situation, inciting more chaos, confusion, and destruction, some posing as “Antifa.” Riots broke out and local businesses and a police precinct were burned and looted. President Trump called in the National Guard and the Army to “dominate” the unrest. Social media lit up like a Christmas tree with posts by people telling their stories of fear, sadness, distrust, pain, and, most often, exhaustion. The calls for white people to assist and support by spreading the message about racial injustice started pouring in. It was time for real allyship to emerge.

NARRATOR #2: What you are about to see are first-hand responses—many expressed through social media pages, to the ongoing travesties that people of color live with every day. Some of the perspectives reflect difficult and intense feelings. You may agree or disagree with some of the statements, but they are actual, honest expressions from real people in the initial weeks following the death of Mr. Floyd. The most important takeaway from this piece is that for people who live in skin that is some shade of brown, the feelings expressed here *never go away*. The expressions may get quieter, but they are never gone. If you feel like they *have* gone away, or that you just don’t see it, that might just be your privilege talking.

NARRATOR #3: We invite you to open your heart, open your mind, and hear what people are feeling. Then, consider how you can choose to help.

MICHELLE OBAMA ALWAYS SAYS IT BEST

NARRATOR: On Tuesday, October 29 2019, former First Lady Michelle Obama spoke at the Obama Foundation Summit in her hometown of Chicago. One particular quote speaks volumes:

I can’t make people not afraid of Black people. I don’t know what’s going on. I can’t explain what’s happening in your head. But maybe if I show up every day as a human, a good human, doing wonderful things, loving my family, loving your kids, taking care of things that I care about—maybe, just maybe that work will pick away at the scabs of your discrimination. Maybe that slowly will unravel it. That’s all we have, because we can’t do it for them, because they’re broken. Their brokenness in how they see us is a reflection of this brokenness. And you can’t fix that. All you can do is the work.

The work that we believe Mrs. Obama is referring to, is about taking an honest, deep look into what

people are feeling, and how they are responding. This piece is our interpretation of that work.

THIS IS WHAT RESILIENCE SOUNDS LIKE

JULIE: May 28, 2020: Checking in on those whose hearts and minds are heavy this morning.

You are so not alone. When you feel helpless about George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, exhale. Remember that you are still alive and can do something. You must find a way to keep moving forward.

Yes, we can.

To my white friends, don't keep your understanding of injustice to yourself. You must do something with it. Those of you who have been doing this for your entire lives, yes, I know you are tired. I am, too. Do take care of yourself. We need you. I need you.

To my Black friends, I wasn't color blind. I saw your skin and I saw you. Most of the Black friends I grew up with in Spring Valley, New York were first generation Haitian or Jamaican. Your parents immigrated to the States around the same time as mine. I practiced with you on the ballfields, pushed you on the swings and ran with you on the playground. I sang with you in chorus, played with you in orchestra, and ate with you in the lunchroom. I passed notes to you in class, talked on the phone with you after school and had sleepovers. Your parents drove us to the movies, helped us with our science project, and gave us snacks. I met you at your lockers, rehearsed with you for the spring musical, and danced with you at prom.

I see you still, my friends. And I love you.

June 1, 2020: What does "I am not okay" mean? For me, it means that my world is exploding. It's as if every pain I have ever felt is coming back to haunt me. I am scared and I am sad. I am grieving that we still don't get it, after decades and decades and decades of supposed lessons learned. My heart aches and I am struggling to breathe.

But I refuse to give up, Mr. DuBois, Mr. Douglass, Ms. Wells, Dr. King, Ms. Lorde, Malcolm, Ms. Morrison, Ms. Hurston, and Mr. Hughes. I learned too much from you to not to try to help communities heal. I refuse to give up, friends, I refuse to give up, Mom. I refuse to give up, Dad.

I refuse to give up.

TONE-DEAF AMERICA

JAEL: How do I feel right now? I haven't had a decent night of sleep for about a week now. I am saddened, frustrated, confused, at a loss for words but yet have so much to say. I am frustrated with the people that think anti-police brutality is "anti-cops." I am annoyed with people that keep saying "all lives matter." Because if all lives matter then why don't Black lives matter?

I am tired of explaining to tone-deaf America why I'm afraid for my brother, dad, and cousins every day when they leave their homes. I'm baffled to see how much hate that we have to deal with *still to this day*.

Above all, I'm thankful for my non-Black friends and acquaintances that are speaking out against such

treatments. Thank you for using your voice and platforms to drive out hate, racial profiling and police brutality. I love you all from the bottom of my heart. I feel your love and support. I'm in tears as I'm typing this. Love conquers hate always.

WHAT I SEE HAPPENING AROUND ME (PART 1)

TATI 1: Growing up, I experienced racism, colorism, and sexism. I always thought that if a boy could lift three chairs, then I could lift four. If my light-skinned friend can play with a group of other light-skinned kids then I can too. If a Caucasian man can get pulled over by the police, show his license and registration and go home with just a warning, then I can too. I wish I still had this mentality. Knowing that Black men, women and children are being treated unfairly around America makes me feel powerless. I don't understand why people are being biased towards skin color. I shouldn't have to wonder about whether I'll make it back home alive after going to get a bag of chips from the store.

TATI 2: Growing up I hated my skin color because at school I would hear people call my other classmates with darker skin complexion “burnt,” and other hurtful names. I felt lesser than the lighter-skinned kids. I would chemically burn my hair straight because I hated having coily 4C hair. I rarely ever saw famous people that looked like me back then so I felt ugly. However, I have grown to realize that Black is beautiful.

TATI 3: There are protests going on about being equal to each other because of how police officers are treating people of color all around the world. All states in America are having protests. A specific protest that sticks out to me is the one in D.C. President Donald Trump hid in a bunker and decided to turn a peaceful protest violent because he wanted to take a picture in front of a church with a bible. He made the officers shoot rubber bullets, tear gas and arrest protesters. These people were unarmed and being peaceful, so why did they attack them? I think the government is abusing their power. Their right to protest and speak freely is protected under the First Amendment. So why are they [the government] going against people's constitutional right? This quote from Cornell Law School's Legal Information Institute explains this right:

(shown on-screen)

The most basic component of freedom of expression is the right to freedom of speech. Freedom of speech may be exercised in a direct (words) or a symbolic (actions) way. Freedom of speech is recognized as a human right under article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The right to freedom of speech allows individuals to express themselves without government interference or regulation.

TATI 4: The coronavirus seems to have gone away from the media because of the protests. The most recent news that I've heard was that camps might be able to open in the summer. I miss my friends and I'm tired

of being home. Quarantine really has negative effects on people's minds. I've been getting sick because of lack of sunlight and movement, but my whole body hurts like I ran a marathon. I can't wait 'til this quarantine is lifted.

The year 2020 will definitely be in history books because of the events that have occurred. I hope this madness ends by September because I don't want my senior year to get messed up. All we can do is sit and wait for what will happen next.

JUST...STOP. PLEASE

CHRIS (*who is white*): If I see one more white person post some meme about Martin Luther King, Jr. never rioting, my head may explode. All that peaceful protesting *got him assassinated by a white man!!* The irony and ignorance is astonishing.

Also, I'm tired of being shown pictures of white cops being nice to Black children, as if that balances things out. We all know that happens. We all already cling to the hope that there is more good than bad out there. What we need to see is white cops standing up to other white cops and calling them out for their racism. Show us pictures and videos of that. The good cops need to take a stand against some of their own. Now. Or else all that effort they put into making their communities better places will have been wasted.

Stop shaming people. Stop looking for ways to keep doing things the way they've always been done. Just...stop. Please.

I AM ANGRY ALL OF THE DAMN TIME

DANA 1: I wish white and non-Black evangelical Trump supporters and sympathizers could feel for ten measly seconds the kind of complete, destructive brokenness I felt after he was elected. The instant rage I feel whenever I hear his voice, see his face, read his words. The complete terror and fear I feel when I read how the folks in and out of my life support him or look on the “bright side” or are slow to condemn him.

To me, he is a racist and he is incompetent, and it is so upsetting that people choose not to understand, not to believe why I am so angry, and that they actively work to invalidate my feelings and experiences. Instead of listening to the reality of Black Americans' distress, I see people creating their own narrative to rationalize and dismiss that pain, and really, it is so UN-Jesus-like that it breaks my spirit. I have felt so incomplete since those election results, like a ghost of myself. I am angry all of the damn time. It is my constant condition. And I cannot let it go. I will not let it go until this man starts getting held accountable and I mean *really* held accountable for his actions and words.

DANA 2: Some of y'all really cling so hard to controlling so many aspects of other people's lives things YOU deem as “sinful” that you will excuse the continuous sins of the President of the United States. Are

leaders not called to a higher standard? Would you make the same excuses for your pastor? Your elders? Whatever happened to leaders being held accountable for their actions?

It is all such a shame. I am beyond disappointed. Was then. Still am now. And sadly, will likely continue to be.

Oh, and while we are here, please do understand that the body should be held accountable too. I have had racist things said and done to me within the church. Things that made me feel so isolated and are part of the reason why I keep to myself in most cases today. And while there are folks who I care about and who I know care about me within the body it shouldn't take my constant cries for folks to understand that *I am hurting*. My family *is hurting*. I may smile for you, talk about other subjects, but make no mistake we are in pain. And for me, the silence I felt over the years, from Trayvon Martin, to Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, Ferguson, Charlottesville, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd etc. etc., that silence not from all but from so many feels like a slap in the face. And boy does it sting.

WILL IT EVER END

DARIAN: I am tired.

(She is reading the paper. The headlines show on a screen, or are heard in a voiceover. She reacts to each headline with more frustration.)

“Florida police officer put on leave after pinning Black man to the ground with knee”

“Alabama police officer cleared in shooting of Black man at mall”

“Police fatally shoot a Brooklyn man, saying they thought he had a gun”

“Arizona man claims he killed teen because victim’s rap music made him feel ‘unsafe’”

ALTERNATING ACTORS: *(Voice overs)* Trayvon Martin. Eric Garner. Michael Brown. Tamir Rice. Sandra Bland. Philando Castile. Ahmaud Arbery. Breonna Taylor. George Floyd.

DARIAN: My heart hurts. I am afraid. I am scared to run in my neighborhood. I fear crossing paths with the police.

But most of all, I am terrified of having children not because of the pains of labor but because I would have to protect them from a world that sees them as a threat and treats their lives as expendable.

Because I would have to give them “The Talk” not about the birds and the bees, but about the harsh reality that in a country that promises liberty and justice for all, there is no liberty and justice for us.

Because I would hold my breath every time they left the safety of our home. Because just being Black puts them at risk.

My mind is troubled. I am angry. “All Lives Matter,” they say. Not when Black people are exterminated by the people that swore to protect and serve. “Violence doesn’t solve anything,” they say. Yeah, tell that to your ancestors. “Not all cops are bad cops,” they say. Well, in the words of Ginetta Sagan, “silence in the face of injustice is complicity with the oppressor.”

So miss me with that crap! My blood boils. When will it end? Will it ever end?

THE SYSTEM

JAIME: I think it's also worth looking at being anti-system versus anti- person. It doesn't matter if there are good cops, it doesn't matter what truth is in anyone's heart. What matters is that the entire system is leading to racist outcomes. *The system enables the murder of Black people and protects the perpetrators, and that's what needs to change.*

A PIECE OF MY WOMB

R.P.: During this time, it has only further proven, solidified, and supported my husband's and my decisions to not bring Black children into this world. This world doesn't deserve a piece of my womb, and it wouldn't be fair to bring a beautiful Black child somewhere that I know is evil. I cannot protect them. I fear becoming a widow at any moment, at the hands of police brutality, especially living in a "white area," and I prepare for that fatal call. But being a single mother or a mother who has to bury her child I don't have the strength for that.

I HEAR YOU

MAY: As I try to find words to express my thoughts and feelings at this difficult time, I am at a loss to find those words that would do justice to convey the ideal message. Mostly, I wish I could hug my dear students, friends, members of the community, and let them know I see you, I hear you, I support you, I am here for you, I love you. My hope is that together we can make the world a better place.

STOP KILLING US

KAYLA: I've dealt with racism all of my life, racist jokes from someone at my school, someone calling me a "f-ing nigger" (*bleep if necessary*) in a store, and I'm sure it will never stop. There's not much more that I can say other than *stop killing us*. Support your Black friends and family today and every day. Donate to Black-owned businesses, protest peacefully, cry, and scream. I'm here with you, and for you.

THE RIGHT THING TO DO

JULIANNA: (*who is white*) What if I told you "all lives don't matter" until Black ones do.... Simply put,

they are part of the “all.” Think of it this way. Three children are swimming. One starts to drown. Everyone is gonna help that child, yes? Does that mean that the other two beautiful children don’t matter? Nope. It’s just who needs our help, compassion, love and support at that time. The right thing to do, whether it’s your child or not, is to help... yes? That’s why white people are saying ‘Black Lives Matter.’ Do we have the “right color” to be in this game? No. But we can speak out, stand in solidarity with them, never settle for less not for us, for them. It’s the best way I’ve thought of to explain. Think about it that way. The words can sound one-sided, but in reality, that’s not what it means. Love everyone. Take your love, smile, kindness, sprinkle it around like confetti.

ARE MY PEOPLE OKAY?

STEPHANIE: Are my brothers okay? Are my parents okay? Are my cousins okay? Are my friends okay? I run through a roll call, a list in my head of my loved ones, and check in. It’s something I usually do, but even more so now.

I knew that I was different growing up, different than a lot of kids in a lot of ways. Being a first generation Haitian American, I grew up knowing that I needed to work twice as hard to be successful and was taught that it was the only way to success. I was also taught the importance of treating everyone with respect, being friendly, and doing your best.

When I personally experienced racism for the first time, I was incredibly shaken up. I couldn’t identify that what was taking place was racism at first.

The older I get, the more and more I understand why my parents didn’t allow my brothers and me to go outside. Growing up, we were inside playing video games, reading, watching TV and rarely going outside to “hang out with friends.” My parents were always concerned about our safety and felt safest and most secure when we were all under the same roof. I see the same look of relief and smiles that overcome their faces when my adult brothers and I are all at home to visit. I see my brothers as loving, gentle, nerdy musical geniuses. To the world, they’re just Black men, a potential threat. Our skin is seen as a threat. And yet we operate in the world with a welcoming smile.

We enter spaces where we’re more than likely to be the only Black person or one of a few and have to take on the weight of feeling as though we speak for all of them. We also have to walk the line of fitting in so we don’t stand out too much.

I understand why my mom can’t sleep. I understand why my dad, the gentle giant he is, tells us that we need to be cool, breathe and be nice. The older I get, the more enraged and tired I get.

SIMPLY TIRED

NADEGE: I’m angry that this is all even happening. Frustrated that we even have to fight for our right to live. Scared because the pessimistic side of me only sees this getting worse. Sad because I know people are dying. But above all, I’m simply tired of having to use analogies and metaphors to explain why

Black Lives Matter, as if the concept of a Black life mattering is some sort of complex theory or formula.

I'm tired of watching videos of Black men, Black women and Black children being killed by police and white supremacists. I'm tired of people trying to justify the killings and minimizing the importance of human lives. I'm tired of the blatant and deeply rooted racism this society has made exceptions and excuses for time and time again. I'm tired of crying over another hashtag. I'm tired of being told to go back to Africa if we don't like it here. I'm tired of being silenced. And I refuse to be silent anymore. I'm ready for things to change. I'm ready for Black lives to be *valued*. I'm ready for people to stop dehumanizing us. I'm ready to be loud and obnoxious if that's what it takes to be heard. I'm ready to destroy the roots of racism and hatred in this country so that when I finally have children, I can be positive that the whole world knows that their lives matter.

AFRICAN AMERICAN HUMANS

PAM (*who is white*)

PAM 1: This madness needs to stop. I was brought up at a time that most of my friends were African American humans. My best friend was a beautiful smart African American human. My high school was mostly African American humans. We respected each other, we sang in choir together, we played on the field together, we marched in band together, we studied in class together, we went on field trips together, we graduated together. My dad's best buddy was a kind African American human, who came over for BBQ, with his whole family.

PAM 2: In Roselle, where I grew up, was a town of diversity. Our police officers were mostly white. Everyone got along and helped each other without violence, without tear gas, without guns, without protests. Black lives mattered, but not without our help and respect and compassion. We don't need guns to protect us, or protests that turn violent. We need action and conversation, peaceful conversation. The rhetoric is too much and dangerous. Protecting our children, all American humans, is by education; having those tough conversations with them.

PAM 3: We are Americans, plain and simple, no matter what race, ethnicity, faith, or by the choices that we make in how we live our lives. Justice will be done to those who have killed these American humans. So inhuman. This police brutality needs to be dealt with. I have known so many good and respectful police officers throughout my life. My friend is the best one I know. This racism has been an ongoing pandemic. Have the conversations *now*. We are all American humans.

NOW?

HERNZ 1:

Did you see...

Did you hear...

Did you listen...

Why did you sleep so long?

Days and decades passed since you first hit that snooze button. Centuries filled with generations that were affected as you dreamt Sound asleep...as we screamed

Drooling on pillows...as blood was spilt

HERNZ 2:

Did you see me...

Did you hear me...

Did you listen to me...

When the chaos got loud you drowned out the noise with your pillow When the flames got bright outside you pulled your blinds

From the old slaves jumping ship drowning in their sorrow and anguish To the new slaves being robbed blind of an opportunity of a fair life.... You were asleep

HERNZ 3:

Did you see me hurting?

Did you hear me calling out to you?

Did you listen to me crying out?

Distractions

A lot of distractions

You're in a room full of distractions

but at a drop of a dime, you can drop all of your distractions

You choose to keep them...and proceed on being distracted

Mumbled noise from the outside but you focused on them distractions

You chose to ignore

You did see me, but you couldn't be bothered.

You heard me call your name, but you were preoccupied.

You were listening but tuned me out when I tried to explain what's going on.

(ACTORS alternate the following lines)

Things have changed in light of recent events and I appreciate everyone who is finally

Standing up,

Showing up,

Speaking up,

Reading up,

But Listen up,

I find it messed up

ALL: that you are finally awake...now.

End of Act One

10 more pages in Act Two