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EMERGENCY & THROUGH THE NIGHT

Two Plays
by Daniel Beaty

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO

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The original New York production of *EMERGENCY* was produced by The Public Theater in October 2006 (Mara Manus, Executive Director; Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director)

The World Premiere Production of an earlier version of *THROUGH THE NIGHT* (entitled *RESURRECTION*) was produced by Arena Stage (Molly Smith, Artistic Director) and Hartford Stage (Michael Wilson, Artistic Director; Michael Stotts, Managing Director)

THROUGH THE NIGHT was developed for the stage and originally produced professionally by the Crossroads Theatre Company, (Marshall Jones, III, Producing Artistic Director; Ricardo Khan, Co-Founder and Artistic Director) and Geffen Playhouse (Gil Cates, Producing Director; Randall Arney, Artistic Director; and Ken Novice, Managing Director)

The Public Theater

OSKAR EUSTIS

Artistic Director

MARA MANUS

Executive Director

presents

EMERGENCE-SEE!

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY DANIEL BEATY

DIRECTED BY KENNY LEON

Scenic Design	BEOWULF BORITT
Costume Design	REGGIE RAY
Lighting Design	MICHAEL CHYBOWSKI
Original Songs	DANIEL BEATY
Instrumental Composition	WILL CALHOUN
Sound Design	DREW LEVY and TONY SMOLENSKI IV
Production Stage Manager	BARBARA REO

Interim General Manager
SETH SHEPSLE

Associate Artistic Director
JOHN DIAS

Director of Development
CASEY REITZ

Director of Marketing
ILENE ROSEN

Associate Producers
PETER DUBOIS
MANDY HACKETT

Director of
Production
RUTH E. STERNBERG

Director of
Communications
ARLENE R. KRIV

Casting
JORDAN THALER
HEIDI GRIFFITHS

Opening night October 22, 2006

Geffen Playhouse

Gilbert Cates
Producing Director

Randall Arney
Artistic Director

Stephen Eich
Managing Director

Presents

emergency

Written and Performed by

Daniel Beaty

Set Designer
Edward E. Haynes Jr.

Lighting Designer
Michael Gilliam

Projection Designer
Alexander V. Nichols

Sound Designer
Cricket S. Myers

Musical Arrangements & Original
Instrumental Music
Kathryn Bostic

Production Stage Manager
John Scutchins

Assistant Stage Manager
Amy Bristol Brownell

Original Songs by
Daniel Beaty

Directed by

Charles Randolph-Wright

Opening Night April 23, 2008

Original New York Production by
The Public Theater in October 2006
Mara Manus, Executive Director · Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director

UNION SQUARE THEATRE

LIBERTY THEATERS, INC.
UNDER THE DIRECTION OF MARGARET COTTER

Daryl Roth

in association with **Jana Robbins**

Presents

THROUGH *the* NIGHT

Written by and starring

Daniel Beaty

Scenic, Lighting/Projection
Design by
Alexander V. Nichols

Sound Design &
Original Music by
Lindsay Jones

Strategic Marketing
aka

Marketing
**Walker International
Communications Group**

Online Marketing
Pit Bull Interactive

Press
O&M Co.

Production Stage Manager
Stacy Waring

Production Manager
Production Consolidated

General Manager
Adam Hess

Company Manager
Kyle Provost

Associate Producers
**Alexander Fraser
Marcia Pendelton**

Directed By

Charles Randolph-Wright

THROUGH THE NIGHT was developed for the stage and originally produced professionally by the Crossroads Theatre Company, Marshall Jones, III, Producing Artistic Director, Ricardo Khan, Co-Founder and Artistic Director and Geffen Playhouse, Gil Cates, Producing Director, Randall Arney, Artistic Director and Ken Novice, Managing Director. THROUGH THE NIGHT was presented by Voza Rivers/New Heritage Theater Group at the Riverside Theatre, Spring 2010.

Opening night September 26, 2010

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Both *EMERGENCY* and *THROUGH THE NIGHT* were originally performed as solo plays. However, my intent was always that these plays would be performed by an ensemble of players. Specific breakdowns of how this should be executed are outlined before each play.

Because character changes will take place quickly, I would recommend relying primarily on the actor's instrument to signify character with changes of body, voice, and emotional intent with perhaps one costume piece to help delineate characters.

-Daniel Beaty, 2010

For more information about Daniel Beaty, please visit
www.DanielBeaty.com.

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CLARISSA

PETER

SLAVE-OLOGIST

RONALD

POLICE OFFICER

BLACK FEMALE SCHOLAR

SHARITA

RODNEY

FREDDIE

REGINALD

SPECTATOR

ANTON

KOFI

RAY RAY CHRISTOPHER

ERIC

SINGER

WAKEEM

FOR MULTIPLE ACTOR CASTS

One Actor plays **REPORTER, ANTON**

One Actor plays **JAMES, FREDDIE, and WAKEEM**

One Actor plays **PISSED OFF NEGRO, POLICE OFFICER and RAY RAY CHRISTOPHER**

One Actor plays **ASHES, RONALD and RODNEY**

One Actress plays **BESSIE and BLACK FEMALE SCHOLAR**

One Actress plays **CLARISSA and SHARITA**

One Actor plays **PETER and REGINALD, KOFI**

One Actress plays **SLAVE-OLOGIST, SINGER, and ERIC (ERIKA)**

(As the house lights fade, the sound of ocean waves followed by helicopters and “news” music fill the stage. Lights up on Liberty Island.)

REPORTER. We are live at Liberty Island with this breaking news report. A slave ship has just risen out of the Hudson River in front of the Statue of Liberty. That’s right, you heard me. A slave ship has just risen out of the Hudson River in front of the Statue of Liberty.

People across Manhattan are leaving their homes and jobs to witness what many are calling—

JAMES. *(a sixty something homeless man with a raspy voice)* Some Deep Shit! I was laying here trying to get me some sleep when out of nowhere I hear this loud rush of water and see this harsh blinding light—make me close my eyes real tight and when I open ‘em again there’s this big huge ship standin’ right here in front of the Statue of Liberty. All old and worn down lookin’.

REPORTER. Slave-ologists are busy trying to figure it out. Yes, emotions are high as people from all walks of life pour into Liberty Island. One group, calling themselves PON—Pissed Off Negroes, have brought tents and rifles and vow to—

PISSED OFF NEGROS. Shoot anybody who try to move ‘dis ship! What?!

REPORTER. Yes. Let’s get some more live on the spot feedback from the crowd gathering here at Liberty Island.

ASHES. *(a twenty something ghetto girl transsexual)* Slave ship? I thought this was the new Carnival Cruise!

BESSIE. *(a seventy something soulful southern grandmother)* When I first saw the slave ship, I was in stunned silence. Then I started to worship, I started to pray, “Thank you Jesus! Hallelujah! Thank you for not forgetting about your people. Thank you for this sign to help

us remember who we are.” I came right away with my grandbaby Clarissa, and her friend Peter—our babies need to see this.

CLARISSA. (*a sassy twelve year-old black girl*) My name Clarissa and this my boyfriend Peter.

PETER. (*a nerdy, self-effacing, twelve year-old boy*) Hi. Hi everybody. Hi—

CLARISSA. I mean, I ain’t never really thought about slavery before this slave ship...Peter, sometimes he be talkin’ about it, but I don’t pay him no attention.

They ain’t teach us nothin’ about it in school.

Naw, they ain’t teach us about Africa or nothing.

Yeh, okay, they taught us about Egypt. The pyramids and stuff, right? Yeh, but nothing about Africa.

Egypt is in Africa? Them people was black?!

PETER. See I told you, Clarissa!

CLARISSA. Shut up, Peter.

SLAVE-OLOGIST. (*a forty-something West African man*) I am a slave-ologist from Ghana, West Africa. During the Civil Rights Movement here in your country, we in Africa looked to black America as inspiration as we fought for our independence at home. And forty years later we are still looking, but the picture is much different. Do you know there are gangs, Crips and Bloods in Ghana?

RONALD. (*a forty something high class colored man*) It’s...it’s... appalling! It’s a setback. In 2008 there are black people succeeding in every field—tennis, golf, we even run for president. This is the last thing we need. I work in corporate America around the corner from here and one of my colleagues just came into my office in tears after hearing the news on the radio and she tells me she has papers that prove her great great grandparents owned slaves and she wants to apologize. And I said, “Why are you apologizing to me, Cathy? It was your great great grandparents.” And she’s hysterical, and

so I say, “Look at me, Cathy. You’ve been to my home, our children play together, look at this office. Cathy, I’m your boss!”

POLICE OFFICER. (*a fifty-something everyday man with a big belly*) Working here at the Statue of Liberty, I’ve always been afraid of a terrorist attack. I never expected anything like...this. I mean, not in a million years.

BLACK FEMALE SCHOLAR. (*a fifty-something, angry sistah with an education*) This slave ship is proof that slavery is not history, its reality. I write books on Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome—how slavery still impacts the minds and hearts of black people today. Look at these people’s faces. This is exactly why most of us never watch those PBS specials or talk about slavery with our children. We don’t know what to do with the anger. But we have to learn from the Jewish people. They vow to never forget. (*She notices something in the distance*) Oh, my God!

REPORTER. And this just in, a black man, appearing to be in his 50s or 60s has just jumped into the Hudson River and is climbing aboard the slave ship. Who is this man? How will this story unfold? Stay tuned for further details.

(*Applause signs light up. Cheesy, yet familiar reality theme show music begins as the screens bear the logo for America’s Next Top Poet!, a blatant rip off from American Idol. The Apollo Theatre—lights up on SHARITA—a sassy twenty-something black female.*)

V/O ANNOUNCER. Ladies and gentlemen, your host, Sharita Jenkins!

SHARITA. (*She sings and dances.*)

Calling all poets, calling all poets,
Top Poets, truth Poets, Yeah...
Calling all poets, calling all poets,
Top Poets, truth Poets, Yeah...

SHARITA. (*cont.*) What's up everybody? Yaw can talk back to me. When I say, "What's up," you say, "What's up. I said, what's up, everybody?!"

My name's Sharita and welcome to the Grand Finale of *America's Next Top Poet!*

Top poets, truth poets, you inspire me,

Carry me past insecurity on wings of hope.

Top poets, truth poets, you weave dreams for me,

Drudge up all they said we'd never be

And carve out diamond possibility.

I see you hidin' behind that preposition,

Tangled up in metaphors,

Sipping on similes,

Shameless rhyme whores,

Bling blingin' with brilliance

And being much more

And bringing us home...

Home to the truth of who we are.

Brilliant, possible, evolving poets

Political, diverse, problem solving poets

"Oh, I offended you? So, what!" poets,

"Comin' for what you stole muthafucka!" poets,

Black, white, everything in between, hola, como estas, olokikijulo, the rasta man, he rhymes, shalom, my Jewish brothers too, freedom fightin', rebellious, bearers of the light pissed off, thuged out, dynamite!, Yaw goin' make me lose my mind up in here! Up in here! poets, make me wanna shout, kick off my shoes, throw up my hands, drop my weary blues—(*She sings.*)—

TONGUE SMACKIN', KNEE-KNOCKIN', LIE BLOCKIN', CLOCK STOPPIN', OUT YA' MIND, JUST IN TIME, FREE AT LAST, SWEET, SUBLIME, THIS IS HOT, WILL NEVER STOP 'CAUSE IT'S A MISSION, A MOVEMENT, A MADNESS...TOP POETS, TRUTH POETS, YEH!!!

(applause sign)

(joking with the crew) I am going to be fabulous tonight. Tyra Banks, you bettah watch out girl, here comes Sharita Jenkins! You bettah recognize!

Alright, let's keep it moving people. We're on a tight schedule! In less than five hours millions of viewers will be tuning in. Rodney you're up next.

RODNEY. *(to SHARITA)* Thank you, Sharita—may I have one second please?

(on his phone) Freddie, what is so important you had to call me out my rehearsal?

Dad's at it again? Well, you have to look for him, Freddie. You can't put this on me, not today.

What do you mean Dad's on TV?

Of course, I heard about Liberty Island.

Aw, hell naw! Dad's on top of a slave ship?

V/O STAGE MANAGER. And five, four, three, two, one—

RODNEY. *(still on the phone)* I'm sorry, Freddie, I gotta go.

V/O SHARITA. Let's show some love for our first poet, Rodney! *(applause signs)*

(RODNEY walks onto the stage at the Apollo Theater. His body and face are in shadows.)

RODNEY. Look at me on the outside,

I'm holding it together.

But inside—

V/O SHARITA. Rodney, find your light.

RODNEY. *(walking into the light)* Sorry, Sharita, is this better?

V/O SHARITA. Is that what you're wearing?

RODNEY. I thought so...is it bad?

V/O SHARITA. Sweetheart, this is the Grand Finale; the world will be watching. Don't worry, we'll fix it. Take it from the top.

RODNEY. Look at me on the outside,

I'm holding it together,

But inside—

(RODNEY is cut off by the sound of his phone alerting him he has a text. He reaches into his pocket.)

RODNEY. *(cont.)* I'm sorry Sharita, I thought I turned this off—

V/O SHARITA. We're on a tight schedule, Rodney.

(RODNEY looks at his phone)

RODNEY. Sharita, I'm sorry. But I gotta go—

V/O SHARITA. Rodney!

RODNEY. *(on his phone)* Freddie, I'm on my way.

(RODNEY approaches his car.)

This can't be happening—not today.

(RODNEY speaks to the audience as he drives.)

It's like he did this on purpose. Our father, he studied the classics; Shakespeare, Keats, never considered what I do real poetry.

When I was in college and told him I was majoring in African-American History, he practically disowned me—"African-American History?! Forget the past, that's why I worked so hard, so you could start where I left off!" And now he's on top of a slave ship?

(sirens; looking in rearview mirror)

Aw, hell naw. He is not stopping me. I don't have time for this, man.

(to officer) Yes, Officer. Is there a problem?

Yes, this is my car—

ID? May I ask why? I mean, was I speeding?

Excuse me, sir, but there's no need to raise your voice.

Fine then. I'll get it.

My ID is in my left hand pocket. I'll get it.

(RODNEY reaches into his coat and pulls out an imaginary gun. Light shifts dramatically to a subconscious world as RODNEY pulls out a gun and shoots the officer...)

BANG! You don't know me.

Man, I live on this block, third house on the right. Come over for dinner sometime, fried chicken and caviar.

(to audience) I've got a college degree, making a hundred-thousand dollars a year and folks still want to stop me in my Beamer, thinking I'm a drug dealer. I don't have time for this, man. I'm over it.

(looking at the gun) I'm seeking liberty at any cost and offering it to everybody who enters my realm. That cop thought he was a bigoted authority figure who was going to ruin my day. BANG! I just freed his mind. No more of this kumbaya my Lord, we shall overcome bullshit. Just BANG!

So, when my Beamer's in the shop and a cabby passes me by on the street...

(to driver) Hey, man, I'm already late! What, you think I won't tip? Here's one...BANG! You don't know me.

When a woman clenches her purse and crosses the street...

(to woman) Actually, ma'am, Coach is not my brand. I prefer Hermes. BANG! You don't know me.

When the clerk follows me through the store at Macy's...

(to clerk) What are you looking at? I'll buy this leather coat and your minimum wage job. BANG! You don't know me.

When my divinity is deemed dirty...BANG! When they call my anger "The Black Man's Disease"...BANG! When they silence, deny, and reject my voice...BANG! BANG! BANG!

AW, HELL NAW!

(RODNEY is back in reality and speaks to the officer at the window.)

RODNEY. (*cont.*) Excuse me?

Oh yes, officer, my ID...I'll get it.

My ID is in my left hand pocket. I'll get it.

Here it is.

(*to himself*) Where did my mind just go?

FREDDIE. (*Harlem apartment, he does a "frustrated vogue dance."*) I feel horrible my brother Rodney had to leave his rehearsal, but I can't do this by myself. Maybe I should take his place and be like, "I'm sorry, Sharita, my brother Rodney can't be here, 'cause our daddy's on top of a slave ship, but he sent his homosexual brother instead! I'm Freddie and the title of my poem is—

(*He sings.*) I'm comin' out!

I'm comin' out like a ho outta panties!

I'm comin' out for that uncle who always shows up at the family reunion with his roommate. Uh huh.

I'm comin' out because I'm tired of living here...inside my own head performing for an audience of one!"

A slave ship? Where did it come from, okay? And why did our daddy have to find it?

I can't think about it...men...that's always a good distraction. I can't tell you how badly I need a date. When I go out, the guys won't even look at me, especially not the black ones. It's like a city full of snow queens. It's like, if you don't have silky white boy hair, act all butch and have big muscles and a six pack they're not even interested.

Look, my hair is kinky, okay? I'm not butch; I'm a big ol' queen. And I don't have two hours a day to spend in the gym. Hello! Or worse, they expect me to be some kind of thugged out black mandingo on the down low. Shoot, I'm tryin' to find one of them myself.

My mind...it's not right. Our dad's on top of a slave ship, my brother's missing his big poetry competition,

and all I can think about is finding a man? *(to his own mind)* Don't tell me I'm not deep. *(to audience)* I wanna be deep. A lonely heart is the deepest thing I know. Rodney tells me there's somebody for everybody. And I guess I just think if I could find a somebody to love me his voice might be louder than the voices in my own head. That's how it started with our father...voices... He was a Shakespearean scholar, brilliant poet. Most black men grow up without their fathers. Rodney and I, we were so proud to have ours.

REGINALD. *(to his sons)* I got out of the ghetto with education, discipline, and perfect diction. As Shakespeare says, "Speak the speech I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue."

FREDDIE. And then it happened...Rodney and I are still young...we sit down for dinner with Dad and Mama isn't home yet and Dad can't reach her when all of a sudden we get a knock on the door...it's the police...
(FREDDIE becomes his father; REGINALD.)

V/O OFFICER. Are you Reginald Johnson?

REGINALD. Yes.

V/O OFFICER. You are the husband of Margaret Johnson?

REGINALD. Yes.

V/O OFFICER. Sir, I am sorry to inform you, your wife has been murdered.

REGINALD. Excuse me?

V/O OFFICER. Sir, I am sorry to inform you, your wife Margaret Johnson has been murdered. At 8 pm this evening she was assaulted and shot to death by a black man in his late teens, apparently an addict...Sir, I'm sorry.

FREDDIE. From the moment our father turned away from the door he has never been the same. He had always been vigilant about Rodney and I being different from the other black kids in our neighborhood. Now, it was like he was possessed...

REGINALD. You boys will not be like these no good black people—to school and straight home. And I don't want to see you even speak to the hoodlums in these streets—you will be...we are...what...what is it?

FREDDIE. Rodney and I started noticing Dad would be in mid-conversation, then his mind would wander off and he would start talking to the air like he was experiencing a whole world in his own head. Then he would be fine. Then time would pass and it would happen again, but worse. This went on for years. Eventually, Dad lost his job at the university, had to move in with Rodney. It was like this world became too much for him so his mind took him to a place his heart could handle. We've got to get our father.

(Liberty Island – helicopters)

VENDOR. Yo! Check it! Slave ship buttons! Yo' ma, check it, I got yo' slave' ship buttons!

REPORTER. Excuse me, sir, but what exactly are you selling?

VENDOR. Buttons! This one here's a slave jumpin' off the boat. And this one here's a slave beatin' his master's ass!

SPECTATOR. I'll take five!

REPORTER. You miss, what's your name and what is your reaction to the ship?

ASHES. My name is Ashes and I thought for certain this was the new Carnival Cruise. But come to find out this some Amistad shit. I come from people on ships like this? Ooh, that is not cute. I keep tryin' to call my friend Freddie—that's his crazyass daddy on the ship—but I can't get through.

PETER. Hi, I'm Peter. I came here this morning with my girlfriend Clarissa and her grandmother after we saw this slave ship on the T.V. Clarissa and I, we live in the South Bronx, but we both have scholarships for school here in Manhattan and all our classmates have these amazing stories about their families tracing all the way back to Asia, Russia, Europe, and all we know is that

our people were slaves. You know? Maybe something in this slave ship can help us find out about what's been lost.

BLACK FEMALE SCHOLAR. This slave ship reflects our need to repair, to put back what's been lost. Reparations: that's one way to heal Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome. That's what I write in my books. Now, I'm not asking the everyday white American to put a dollar in the everyday black person's pockets. But there are million dollar companies in existence today that made their first profits from slavery. If your slave ran away, Aetna insured you'd get them back—

JAMES. (*interrupting*) Spare change, ma'am? Anything'll help...a dime, a nickel, a penny...shit, damn, anything.

BLACK FEMALE SCHOLAR. (*to JAMES*) Excuse you. (*to REPORTER*) Why shouldn't Aetna pay reparations, in terms of education, social—

JAMES. Repa-what?

BLACK FEMALE SCHOLAR. Reparations: paying black people back for slavery.

JAMES. What you smokin' crack? Slave ship or not, you out yo' damn mind. Spare change?

BLACK FEMALE SCHOLAR. Get out of my face!

JAMES. Aw, fuck you then!

BLACK FEMALE SCHOLAR. (*to REPORTER*) This man is my point exactly. (*to JAMES*) Fuck you too! (*to REPORTER*) It's not about the few us that make it; it's what slavery has done to the psyche of the masses. Why do you think there are more black people in jail and poor than any other group? Because we're inferior? No, the ghetto is a modern day plantation. Oh, but don't get it twisted; you can have a six figure income, a PhD, and still be a slave.

But it's never too late to redeem the past, is it? What's the most well know gospel song of all times everybody knows at least one verse? *Amazing Grace*, exactly. And

this man keeps walking around everywhere singing it. I always assumed it was written by a black person during slavery like the Negro Spirituals. It was actually written by a white man, a slave trader who later in life found God and fought against slavery. (*singing*) AMAZING—

POLICE OFFICER. Ma'am, you're not part of the official team, we need you to evacuate the island immediately.

BLACK FEMALE SCHOLAR. If yaw don't stop interrupting me! I'm not leaving.

POLICE OFFICER. Immediately, ma'am! We're evacuating people this way.

BLACK FEMALE SCHOLAR. I said I'm staying right here.

POLICE OFFICER. Ma'am, I need you to come with me—

BLACK FEMALE SCHOLAR. Get yo' hands off of me—

I don't care if you an officer of the law, they already enslaved our people, you think I'm scared of jail—

REPORTER. Tensions are high and escalating here at Liberty Island. Hundreds of people are arriving with suitcases, old trunks, even trash bags full of clothes attempting to board the ship. Oprah is calling this slave ship a “full circle “ah ha” moment.” Liberty is in a state of emergency.

FREDDIE. (*outside his Harlem Apartment*) Where is Rodney? He should be here by now.

(*a reggae beat as Dreadlocks cross the outer screens*)

There's this one guy, right? His name's Anton. He's Jamaican. He's got that sexy accent— (*to himself*) What am I doing? With all this going on, I shouldn't be thinking about a man. But that body and those beautiful dreadlocks. Me and my best girlfriend Ashes, we see him almost every day strutting down the streets of Harlem. He is always talking to some woman though. He doesn't even know I exist.

(*to God*) I'm a gay man just give me a normal gay man! Hello?

(to audience) God, what am I doing? I feel like I'm trapped in this gay rat race except I'm a hamster on a treadmill and I'm not going anywhere and all the buff gay rats just keep passing me by.

(ANTON appears) Oh, my God, he's here.

(The actor sings a hard reggae melody and becomes

ANTON, a Jamaican man. He sings.)

ANTON. Mmm Mmm Mmm...it's all about freedom—liberate your mind,

Duh—Mmm Mmm...when you look inside, you find the truth of who you are.

Eh?

Your name Freddie? All right? Me Anton.

Yeh, mon. Me seen you sitting on the stoop before always with that fine woman.

Oh, you just friends? What her name then?

Ashes...yeh, mon, that's nice.

Coffee? Do me want to have coffee...with you?

No, mon...me don't drink coffee. Me mean, not that flavor.

Eh, it's no problem.

Yeh, mon. Me heard about the slave ship.

No, mon, me ain't goin' go see it. Me don't need go Liberty Island to see no slave ship. Me a white man. Me decided last year. Think about it...when we die everything wastes away...but the bones. Time pass and the casket...it full of bones. Check this: we all got white bones. We all the same on the inside, so why can't me be a white man on the outside?

Me don't have no job because everyone think me crazy when me check the box marked white on the application. Me ex-girlfriend, she say me lazy, me don't wanna do no work. Me say, "Me a rich white man. Me jus' waitin' for the universe to notify the bank."

Eh...so, when you goin' introduce me to your friend...
Ashes—

RODNEY. Freddie, come on, let's go.

FREDDIE. Dang, Rodney, what took you so long?

RODNEY. I got stopped by the cops. Freddie, is there anyway you can do this without me?

FREDDIE. Rodney, you know I can't—

RODNEY. I don't have time for this—come on, let's go.

(Liberty Island:)

REPORTER. Reporting live from Liberty Island where the crowds have gotten out of control. Some people are running around screaming speaking in unknown tongues as if possessed and dancing what appears to be ancient African dance. The streets have been blocked off, the National Guard has been called in, and authorities are advising people to stay home. We are speaking now with a slave-ologist. You are from Ghana, West Africa, correct?

SLAVE-OLOGIST. Yes, brother, I am.

We have identified the slave ship as one of the many dispatched from the Cape Coast Slave Dungeons of Ghana, West Africa.

We can tell where it comes from by the shape of the ship, the style of the wood, the engravings. We call this slave ship Remembrance.

(aboard Remembrance)

(Lights up on REGINALD JOHNSON—Rodney and Freddie's 55 year-old father. He stands aboard the slave ship possessed by KOFI—the Spirit of a 400 year-old African Chief. KOFI speaks with a West African accent and is the voice in italics.)

REGINALD/KOFI. *(Singing)*

COME, COME HOME.

COME, COME HOME,

COME, COME HOME TO THE TRUTH OF WHO
WE ARE.

(Spoken) Professor Reginald Johnson...you think you've got it all figured out. How can you deny my existence? Telling your sons to forget the past—

Who are you?

I am the You, you have denied. Your pain does not give you a right to deny me—

What do you know about my pain?

Your murdered wife Margaret—

Don't you dare mention her name!

I am Chief Kofi: leader of the captured Africans who rode aboard this slave ship Remembrance.

Slave ship—that's impossible. That would make you 400 years old—

I am Chief Kofi! I do not lie—

I am a man of reason. How do you expect me to believe?

From the depths of the Atlantic Ocean I summoned this slave ship full of the bones of your ancestors.

This is not real. It's all in my head—

Open your eyes. See where you are, you stand on Remembrance—

No it's not possible—

Look, it's full of bones—

Absolutely not—

Your ancestors demand it!

No, don't make me—

Look, it's full of bones!

(REGINALD looks into the ship.) Oh no, the bones... they're in chains...and the ship, it's full of them. *(He screams to the spectators below.)* It's full of bones! It's full of bones!

(The Apollo)

SHARITA. *(on cell phone)*

(to herself) He is not answering.

(leaving a message) Rodney, sweetheart, this is Sharita. In less than four hours millions of viewers will be tuning in. Now, I know about your issues with your father and we'll do whatever we can to make this work, but you need to give me a call immediately and tell me where you are.

(to the crew) Alright, let's continue with Ray Ray Christopher's sound check.

V/O SHARITA. Come on everybody, let's show some love for Ray Ray Christopher! *(applause signs)*

(RAY RAY CHRISTOPHER—a sixteen year-old poet with a hip hop vibe.)

RAY RAY CHRISTOPHER. As a boy I shared a game with my father.

We played it every morning 'till I was three.

He would knock knock on my door

And I'd pretend to be asleep 'till he got right next to the bed

Then I would get up and jump into his arms.

Good morning Papa.

And my Papa, he would tell me that he loved me.

We shared a game...knock knock.

'Till the day the knock never came

And my mama takes me on a ride

Past cornfields, on this never-ending highway,

'Till we reach a place of high rusty gates

A confused little boy, I enter the building

Carried in my mama's arms...knock knock

We reach of room of windows and brown faces.

Behind one of the windows sits my father.

I jump out of my mama's arms and run joyously
towards my papa's

Only to be confronted by this window

I knock knock trying to break through the glass, trying
to get to my father

I knock knock as my mama pulls me away before my
papa even says a word.

And for years he has never said a word

And so fifteen years later I write these words for the
little boy in me

Who still awaits his papa's knock:

Papa come home 'cause I miss you,

Miss you waking me in the mornings and telling me
you love me.

Papa come home 'cause there's things I don't know

And I thought maybe you could teach me

How to shave, how to dribble a ball,

How to talk to a lady, walk like a man,

Papa come home 'cause I decided a while back

I want to be just like you but I've forgotten who you
are.

And fifteen years later a little boy cries and so I speak
these words and try to heal,

Try to father myself and I dream up

A father who says the words my father did not—

Dear Son, I'm sorry I never came home.

For every lesson I failed to teach, hear these words:

Shave in one direction with strong deliberate strokes
to avoid irritation.

RAY RAY CHRISTOPHER. (*cont.*) Dribble the page with the brilliance of your ballpoint pen.

Walk like a god and your goddess will come to you.

No longer will I be there to knock on your door so you must learn to knock for yourself.

Knock knock down doors of racism and poverty I could not. Knock knock on doors of opportunity for the lost brilliance of the black men who crowd these cells. Knock knock with diligence for the sake of your children. Knock knock for me for as long as you are free these prison gates cannot contain my spirit; the best of me still lives in you. Knock knock with the knowledge that you are my son, but you are not my choices.

Yes, we are our father's sons and daughters, but we are not their choices

For despite their absences we are still here.

Still alive...

Still breathing...

With the power to change this world one little boy and girl at a time.

Knock knock.

Who's there?

We are.

(*Liberty Island—helicopter*)

ASHES. (*to SOLDIER*) Oooh, you soldiers look so handsome in yo' uniforms. What is yaw Marines or somethin'?

The National Guard...okay. Well, you know, Ashes love performing for the troops...hey! (*singing*)

ALL OF THESE BIRTHIN' PAINS, AND YOU TELL ME TO PUSH AGAIN?

ALL OF THESE BIRTHIN' PAINS, AND YOU TELL ME TO PUSH AGAIN?

ALL OF THESE BIRTHIN' PAINS, AND YOU TELL ME TO PUSH AGAIN?

I-AAAAAHHH!—DON'T WANNA PUSH NO MORE!
NOT GONNA PUSH NO—

(Her phone rings cutting off her song, she waves goodbye to the soldiers)

(on phone) Freddie! Boo, I been trying to reach you.

I already know yo' daddy at it again—I'm looking at his crazy ass now—I had a client down here—

I know it's early, but these men be trippin' if they can't get it when they want it.

You talked to Anton? The Jamaican guy?

Ooh, Faggot, you done lost yo' mind. What he say?

He wanna meet me? *(deep voice)* Did you tell him?

Ooh, Freddie, it's this cute reporter...I gotta go. I see you when you get here.

(She hangs up – to REPORTER.) Excuse me, Mr. Reporter man...that man on the slave ship, his sons is on they way—I know them for real...I'll hook you up with an interview when he get here. I promise, dang.

How do I feel about this slave ship? To be honest, I got my own damn problems. I'm more concerned about Lady Liberty—that's my girl. We just alike...grand, fabulous, and yearning to be free.

My sistah, she gave me a pamphlet said, "Where will your soul spend eternity?" I said, "In hell, honey! I'm goin' kick Satan off the throne and say turn up the goddamn heat!"

My sistah, she just had her a baby. I wish I could have me a baby. Ooh, but not like hers. She got a ugly ass baby, okay. E'rybody keep lying to her though, tellin' her how cute the baby is. That baby ain't cute. Look like one of them troll dolls dipped in chocolate. Yaw know what you say when you see a ugly baby right? Oh, come on, yaw know what to say. "Aw, that baby look just like you!"

ASHES. (*cont.*) My sistah, she say I got me a demon just 'cause I'm determined not to stay trapped in this man's body. Well, I say, "I may have been born a man but that don't mean I gotta stay that way. That's why I'm selling my ass so I can buy my tits." I say, "You damn right I got me a demon and I'm setting her free. I jus' wanna be free." I'm givin' birth to my own damn Statue of Liberty and I say—

(*singing*) Ashes to Ashes, dust to dust,

The secret of life is to die before you die,

The old me is slowly falling away,

I'm creating a new me from the (*deep voice*) Ashes, Ashes—

REPORTER. That's very interesting, Ashes. A little racy for network TV, but you should try HBO.

JAMES. (*to ASHES*) Spare change?

Aww, baby, what's your name?

Ashes?

I see you later. Girl, you so fine I'd drink yo' dirty bath water.

(*to audience*) Who knew a slave ship would bring out so many fine black women! Statue of Liberty supposed to be a black. I saw the sculptor's sketches in a museum in Paris—had a full round face and black features, had a broken chain in one hand and another at her foot. She supposed to be black. That's why I sleep here. I'm protesting. A good ol' fashion sleep in. I'm not leaving this bench until they give the Statue of Liberty a flat nose and a fat ass!

(*To REPORTER*) Hey, Mr. Reporter, what's that you snackin' on? Them some old french fries? Let me get a taste? Oh, come on, man. Let me get a taste. Aw, fuck you then. I ain't want none no way. I got something better. You wanna know what I got? I ain't goin' tell you what I got 'cause you ain't goin' get none. Aw, all right, I'll tell you...

(He takes out a slice of pound cake in a plastic wrapper. He eats the pound cake throughout the following, treating it like a special treasure.)

Pound cake. Pound cake, man. When I was a little boy, my mama used to make the best pound cake in all North Carolina.

I mean, it was the bomb. I 'member, she'd get up at like seven or eight in the morning and take out the butter and the sugar and the eggs.

And I'd be like, "Mama, you gonna make a pound cake?" And she'd be like, "Yeh, James, I'm goin' make a pound cake, baby."

And I then 'member, she'd mix it and stir it for what seemed like hours. And all us kids would take a turn mixin', stirin', helpin' Mama make the pound cake.

And then I 'member we'd go outside and play in that red North Carolina dirt with them chickens and our dog...Rosco, and we could smell it...cookin'.

And then I 'member, she'd take it out of the oven and the whole house would smell so good and that cake, it be all soft and brown. And then she'd cut it...she'd cut it...

(He takes a long, intense bite of the pound cake that affects him emotionally.)

...and it'd be like...like gold inside.

(JAMES begins to see an image of his mother in the distance.)

Aahhh...and I 'member, the look on my mama's face—the smile on my mama's face as we all sat down to eat the pound cake. I 'member...yeh, Mama...I 'member.

(helicopter, the sounds of cameras flashing and clicking)

FREDDIE. *(to REPORTER)* No, I'm not giving no goddamn interview. *(to Police)* What are you waiting for? Get him off the fucking ship!

RODNEY. Freddie, calm down—

FREDDIE. Rodney, they got cameras all over the place, people staring at him like he's some kind of zoo animal.

RODNEY. (*visibly shaken and nervous*) They think he might be dangerous. This is crazy.

FREDDIE. He's mentally ill people not an axe murder!

RODNEY. (*To REPORTER*) Yes, I'm Rodney.

I am on *America's Next Top Poet!*, but this is really not the—

FREDDIE. Leave my brother alone...our father's in pain.
(*camera flash and click*) If you take another picture of us, I'm going to take that camera and shove it up your—

RODNEY. (*totally overwhelmed and freaked out*) Freddie, you got to me get me out of here.

FREDDIE. Come on, give me your hand, Rodney. (*to the Reporters and crowd*) I'm warning you...move out of our way!

(*aboard Remembrance*)

REGINALD/CHIEF KOFI. What do you want with me, Chief Kofi? Why are you doing this to me? To my sons—

You must remember—

Remember what?

Remembrance, the fullness of who you are...your past—

Why do you even care?

To be or not to be that is the question—

To be or not to be...what?

Free, of course, you forgot.

A ghetto hoodlum murdered my wife, left my sons motherless, why should I remember that?

'Tis nobler in the mind to suffer—

Suffer what?

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, that's how you forgot.

Outrageous fortune, that's how I forgot.

*But the time has come to put to rest the chains that bind you.
Sleep no more.*

(The Apollo)

SHARITA. Wake up, people! Has anyone heard from Rodney?

What do you mean the cell phone lines are down?

(to one of the poets) Eric, you're up next. Now, I'm still uneasy about you doing this poem. The NAACP buried the N word six months ago and now we've got a slave ship in the harbor, I'm not trying to have a bunch of old black folks protesting the show. Use the word 'Negro'—they'll get the point.

V/O SHARITA. Come on everybody, let's show some love for Eric!

(The actor becomes ERIC—a nerdy twenty year-old poet)

ERIC. The title of this poem is *Duality Duel, an Autobiography of Personal Insanity*.

There's a battle going on inside of me
Between my well-crafted external persona
And an internal force trying to break free.

It's battle, you see, between the Nerd and the Negro
in me.

Can the Nerd and the Negro co-exist?

They goin' have to Nerd—

But, Negro, it doesn't make sense,

I didn't spend four years in the Ivy League
Learning how to think, talk, and feel

In order to jump into a rage every time they try and
kill...me.

But the truth is, Nerd, I've always been around

When that poison ivy bullshit was beating yo' ass down,

ERIC. *(cont.) These strong Negro arms, they held you, told you not to feel it,*

Gave you time enough to heal it and become a nerd again.

But, Negro, all you seem to feel is rage,

And that will keep me out of their circles

And off the front page of The New York Times and
The Daily News

Not if you shoot a muthafucka!

And that's my point, you are more than that cold,
stony glare,

Those weighty Timberlands, and that nappy hair.

Aw, hold up, now—

No, listen Negro, that rage, it's like a cage that keeps
love out

And you in jail burning in negro thug negro hell—

Aw, shut up, Nerd, you ain't heard a word I said.

I gotta smack you upside yo' well-brushed head?

Without me there is no you—

Now, wait a second, Negro, let's talk this through—

Naw, Nerd, journey to the Negro in you!

I been silent long enough, got yo' ass through school

Gave you time enough to learn they rules,

Now the time has come for you to pay yo' dues

'Cause these little kids in the street, they need you.

But they think they can't relate 'cause you act all removed.

When the truth is, Nerd, what they are is you,

'Cause no matta how hard you try

To deny the way you think, talk, and feel.

Yo' daddy still smoke heroine,

Yo' brother still on crack,

Ghetto nightmares still haunt yo' dreams

And yo' mama is still black.

I ain't sayin' you gotta become me but this one thing is true

Inside you is a hard ass Negro you gotta let come through

'Cause this assimilatin' bullshit will surely beat you down,

And if you choke me long enough, my Nerd, I will not stick around.

Put the strut back in yo' walk, say what you really feel

Be all of you so all of us can heal.

The time for the lyin' and denyin' is through

It's time, Nerd, journey to the Negro in you!

(Liberty Island)

REPORTER. Since the emergence of Remembrance early this morning crowds have continued to form here at Liberty Island. Attempts to disperse the crowds have been unsuccessful as people tell stories of all sorts inspired by this slave ship...

SLAVE-OLOGIST. *(forty-something West African man)* My name is Kwesi Adom and I am so glad to be in your New York City at this important time—

(JAMES, the homeless man, interrupts him.)

Pardon me?

Spare change? I'm sorry but I don't understand.

Oh, you want money?

But I don't have any change.

"Fuck me then?"

I love New York!

(To the crowd gathered around) As a slave-ologist, slave dungeons are my specialty. And with this slave ship, I feel compelled to tell you what I know. I will take you on a tour as if you were standing with me in Ghana, West Africa. The slave dungeons you are about to see

are the largest facility where the Africans were kept during the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As our tour begins, we here at the Slave Dungeons ask that you leave your rage and pain at the entrance gate because there is enough inside. Thank you and please follow me.

(As he turns, he becomes an African woman searching for her missing husband who has been captured. She speaks in Ga—a West African language—a breathless plea for God's help.)

SLAVE-OLOGIST. *(cont.)* Me da wase me yon ku pon. Me da wase me Kwesi...me Kwesi.

(To crowd) We have just entered the courtyard where the Africans were first brought in chains after being captured from their neighboring villages. Here, they stood in the broiling sun while they were inspected by the Dutch Masters. Thank you and please follow me.

(As he turns upstage, his hands cross violently above his head as if chained. Enraged, he speaks the following words of resistance to an imaginary guard.)

Olokikijulu amanla owetu! Olokikijulu amanla owetu!

(To crowd) We have now entered the Slave Dungeons where the Africans were kept. Here, they defecated on the same floor where they slept and ate. You notice to your right a set of stairs. They lead to the Master's quarters. The African women would be led up the stairs and then raped by the Master. Thank you and please follow me.

(As he turns upstage, he becomes an African woman being raped by the Master. She weeps the following words...)

Me da wase me yon ku pon. Me da wase me Africa...me Africa.

(To crowd. He walks downstage as he says the following...)
We have now reached the final room of our tour.

This is where the Africans were brought before they boarded slave ships like Remembrance for the passage to America. Here, you notice a small rectangular window—the Gate of No Return. By the time the Africans—the slaves—reached this point, they were so small and weak they could fit through this small rectangular window...my brothers and sisters, the time has come...we have arrived...

(He steps back into his original position and the lights shift. He smiles.)

...at then end of our tour. Thank you and have a nice day.

RONALD. *(a forty-something, high-class, colored man)* Slavery ended two hundred years ago. We need to get over it. It's been forty years since the Civil Rights Movement. It's time to move on people.

What do I think about reparations? It's an absurd concept. This is Cathy. I'm her boss. I make much more money than she does. Why should Cathy pay me reparations even though her great, great grandparents owned slaves—

Cathy, where are you going? Oh, no, they're chasing her! Run, Cathy, run!

This place is out of control. Not all white Americans owned slaves. Many fought to free them. Affirmative action was reparations enough. I'm not an Uncle Tom. I'm not a sellout. I'm just tired of black people asking for a handout.

SLAVE-OLOGIST. Is that really how you feel? After what I just shared about the slave dungeons? You need to come back to Africa and reconnect—

RONALD. Reconnect? I don't need to go back to Africa. I can reconnect...to that black man begging money for food. Reconnect to that black woman prostituting herself to keep a roof over her head. Reconnect to those black kids in the orphanages who are like four and five and nine years old living with AIDS who nobody wants

to adopt because they're sick and they're not babies anymore. Yes, they are the product of this slave ship, but nobody's going to help us if we don't start helping ourselves! *(pause)* We are here now. We have arrived.

SINGER.

AMAZING GRACE, HOW SWEET THE SOUND THAT SAVED A
WRETCH LIKE ME.

OH—I ONCE WAS LOST BUT NOW I'M FOUND, WAS BLIND
BUT NOW I SEE.

RODNEY. *(to OFFICER)* Yes, Officer, the man on the slave ship is our father.

No, we've never known our father to be dangerous.

Of course not, he couldn't possibly have access to a bomb or gun or anything like that—

It's alright, Freddie—

FREDDIE. No, it's not! He was a professor...a scholar—

Wait here? No, we're tired of waiting—if you people are so scared he's dangerous, we'll get him ourselves—

He's our father, and you will not continue to make a spectacle of him.

Where are you going?!

(aboard remembrance)

REGINALD/KOFI. My sons...they're frightened, I can feel them...I have to save my sons—

*How can you save your sons, when you will not save yourself?
I do this for you—*

My children are suffering!

*Many of our children are suffering. Lost without the Truth.
That is why I sent Remembrance!*

*(The Apollo—lights and theme music for America's
Next Top Poet! Sharita sings and dances.)*

SHARITA.

CALLING ALL POETS, CALLING ALL POETS,
TOP POETS, TRUTH POETS, YEAH...

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